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JUST FOR TWO

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CUTTING



N.B.

Sutton

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Just for Two

BY THE SAME AUTHOR



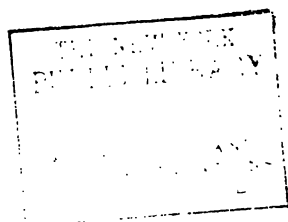
The Wayfarers

The Suburban Whirl

Little Stories of Married Life

More Stories of Married Life

Little Stories of Courtship





HE AND SHE HAD LEFT EARTH BEHIND

edited by
John G. Kennedy, A. J. Keller
and Robert Chomsky



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Just for Two

By

Mary Stewart Cutting

Illustrated by
Edmund Frederick, A. I. Keller
and Robert Edwards

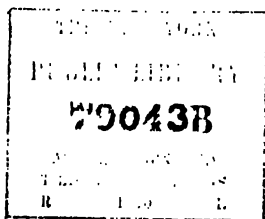


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L. C.

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6

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I THOUGHT you were not going on that trip around the world until next spring!"

"Yes, that was the intention, but uncle changed all his plans a couple of weeks ago, very suddenly. We sail day after to-morrow, early in the morning; I told your friend Mr. Waller about it last Wednesday, at the Lancasters'. I thought — Did n't he tell you?"

The girl who asked the question looked so lovely that the man she spoke to forgot to answer for a moment. With all her evident youth and her frankness, she had a gentle dignity and womanliness that indescribably allured by what it seemed to reserve. Her small figure was clothed in some white, silvery gauze which gave a rose-leaf tint to her neck and arms and cheeks; it deepened the warm dusk of her loosely waved hair, and the warm red of her parted lips. The dark blue eyes upraised to his — Vernon was six feet two — had in them something sweetly

[3]

THE END

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deferential that had been also guilelessly manifest in her tone; the quality both intoxicated and inspired — he did not command deference just now, as a rule. He answered with resentment against the recreant Waller:

“No, he never told me a word. If he only had!”

“I thought you had rooms together?”

Vernon's face suffered a quick change. “Yes, we have — but he's the closest fellow! And you're going away day after to-morrow — for a year! Why, I'd looked forward — more than I can say! — to seeing a lot of you this winter; I thought we'd only just begun — begun to be friends.”

“Oh!” said the girl. The swift colour rose in her cheek at his tone; she laughed with shy pleasure. “I'm so glad you said that! Do you know, I've always fancied that you were so dreadfully critical — that you really did n't like me very much? This evening, now — you did n't come near me until a few minutes ago! Somehow, I've never been able to talk the way I want to with you; I think and think beforehand what I shall say, and then, after all, when I'm with you, I'm perfectly stupid! I expected



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to see you at the Ranvilles' last week, and when you were n't there — Do you know, I'm always mistaking Mr. Waller for you, you look so much alike in evening dress? There's something in the set of his shoulders — you're both so tall —"

"I hope you did n't say the things to him that you'd meant for me," said Vernon hastily.

"No; oh, no! — I wanted to tell you, before I went away for so long, that I'd always known about your saving Alice Vale's brother from drowning when you were at college, and how many people you helped to rescue in the San Francisco fire; Mrs. Irving told me. I've been so *proud* to know you! Oh, dear!" she broke off with an appealing vexation. "There's Mr. Cramer looking for me on the other side of the room; it's his waltz, and Aunt said we must leave after that! Hide me, please! We go off to the country for all day to-morrow, and come back to a hotel to be ready for the steamer in the morning — but I'll be at the Club ball to-morrow evening; I'll see you then to say good-bye, anyway."

"I'm afraid I can't be there," said Vernon reluctantly. "I've an engagement."

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"You said a little while ago that you had n't any!"

"I have n't any engagement to go out — but ——" he hesitated. "I've an engagement — with Waller — at home."

She looked at him with an astonishment which she was too inexperienced to conceal.

"You can't possibly have one with him; he asked me for two dances. Why do you never go out together? Oh, I *beg* your pardon!" She blushed furiously. "I did n't mean to be impertinent — indeed! And I forgot that you might not want to come, of course."

She rose with youthful dignity, though she was trembling a little. Are you looking for me, Mr. Cramer? Good night, Mr. Vernon — and good-bye!"

Was there ever such luck! Henry Vernon, standing moodily against the wall, his dark hair falling over his forehead and his tall figure bent forward, watched her slim figure in silvery white, whirling around the room in the arms of a stout young man, whose legs struck out wildly far behind him in large, circling sweeps. Another couple went past, the man with one shoulder affectedly hunched higher than the other. Another, with his

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partner's hand clenched in his, seesawed the air with his elbow. Another yet supported a woman's head upon the lapel of his coat as they revolved slowly, around and around, in one corner of the room. *Her* head reached just about as high as that on the lapel of *his* coat. What guys men looked like when they danced!

He waited until the end of the waltz, with a new eagerness to seize the chance of another word from her, but he did not get it, although she passed near him; her face flushed a little — but that might only have been at what the other fellow was saying, she did not look toward Vernon. She did not turn her head, even when she passed him in the vestibule on her way out — he stood in the porch and heard her carriage door slam shut before it drove away. Then he hailed a cable car and went downtown — far, far down, stopping at a dark, empty cross street, in a quarter sacred to wholesale trade. The watchman outside of one of the warehouses greeted him familiarly as Vernon strode up and turned his latchkey in a side-door that, opening, showed a narrow flight of stairs going upward.

“Sure, it's your night out late, sir.

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Himself has been in a good hour or more, I seen his light goin' backward and forward a bit at first, but he's settled down now."

"He's reading for an examination," said Vernon.

"That readin's terrible bad on the eyes. After ye've had your diversions it's best for gentleman b'ys like youse to sleep. Sleep's the grandest thing in the wur-ld."

"You're always trying to tuck us into bed," said Vernon indulgently, "but it's no use, Barney! Here's a cigar for you." He closed the door and, striking a match, ran up the dark stairway to open another door on the landing above, toward which a broad ray of light streamed past barrels and packing-cases from the back premises beyond. The front was dimly railed off into offices, with intervening shelves and drawers above a counter at the side. Across the room, at the side, through a wider opening, more packing-cases were visible, and the ropes of a freight elevator. Vernon, with the casual glance of habit, steered his way through crates of green bottles, baskets of cork, marking-pots and brushes, and other like paraphernalia, coming at last to the lighted space beyond the high barrier of

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wooden cases — a space which, stretching across the two rear windows, gave in its arrangement a semi-military suggestion of a camp. Two narrow cot beds, neatly made up with dark gray blankets, stood against the wall at one end; in the farther corner, with two immense sponges hanging above it, was the dark green back of a “hat” bathtub, and on the top of a curtained box were a couple of white japanned plates, two cups and saucers of the same ware, and a tin coffee-pot. A couple of empty packing-cases evidently took the place of wardrobes, and a smaller one, near a little cylinder stove, which sent out a red glow from its open door, served as a table.

On this table were a green cloth, a large Rochester lamp and a pile of books. A camp-chair flanked it on one side, and on the other a very large young man in yellow pajamas, with a heavy face and a crop of dark hair, sat rocking sleepily, while a book rested unsteadily on his knee.

“Wake up, you!” said Vernon, catching up a pamphlet and throwing it at the drowsy one, who promptly straightened himself, while the book fell to the floor with a bang.

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"I'm cold and I'm hungry — I thought you'd have the pot of coffee on for me."

"You thought wrong, then," said Waller grimly. "See here, you look out how you fool around — you nearly upset the lamp. What are you searching over there for?"

"Beer. Is n't there any?"

"Not unless you brought some. The only thing we have in the house are those bananas — you might as well eat 'em; they'll spoil if you don't."

"It's a winning invitation," said Vernon, hanging his overcoat and hat up on a nail.

"I don't care whether it's winning or not. What are you hungry for, anyway? Did n't you get any supper at the Harrisons'?"

"Two hours ago."

Waller yawned, and, picking up the book off the floor, with a sudden lengthening out of his long arm slapped it down on the table behind him, saying, "Well, I'm going to bed. I've been too dead tired all the evening to study; I don't know how I'll ever pass that Civil Service examination. I'll never get back where I was before the earthquake! I wish I'd never come on here at all. Of course, it was good of Carlsen to help us out by taking us on temporarily, but it's a beastly

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way of living at the best; I'll put my foot through those extract bottles some day, I know I shall."

Vernon regarded him with whimsical irritation as he began to remove his outer clothing, without any further investigation of the larder. "I never saw such a fellow as you are, Waller! When I'm happy you're in the sunshine column, all right; but when I'm down in the mouth, hanged if I don't always have to yank you out of the depths. It is n't fair!"

"Look out, there!" cried Waller in a voice like a pistol shot. He sprang forward on the instant to pick up the coat, which, thrown at a box, had missed it and fallen to the floor. He held it up with one hand while he brushed it off reverently with the other.

"I'll stand any jawing you like, but I'm not going to have any funny business with these clothes."

"You're right about that," said the other meekly. He relapsed into the camp-chair and sat there with his hands clasped across his knees, staring moodily before him. But I wish you'd take care yourself; it looks as if one of those seams across the back were giving way — your shoulders are getting too

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broad; you've got to let up on those exercises. It's no joke having only the one dress suit between us. See here, Waller, I want to ask a favour of you; I know what a good sort you are, really. Will you let me wear those togs to-morrow night at the Club dance?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because it's my turn to wear 'em — and any other reason you please. You had your show to-night, and I have mine to-morrow. It was in the bond when we bought them."

"But, Waller —"

"I'm going to bed. You can open the window and turn out the light."

"But I've got to have that suit to-morrow! It's serious."

"You'll find out it is if you try to wear it!"

"Ah, be decent! There's a girl I've got to see, Waller; it's my last chance. She's going away the next day."

"Miss Valentine?"

"Yes."

"Are you in *love* with her?"

Vernon reddened — his touched consciousness rushed glibly into the usual denial:

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"She's the last girl I'd ever think of in that way."

"Oh, if you've got as far as that ——!" Waller's tone was sardonic. "I suppose you'll be carrying the engagement ring around in your pocket next — have it handy, in case ——! But you can make your mind easy — *I'm* going to see her to-morrow night."

"All right, I give you fair warning that, if you won't let me have the suit, I'll take it."

"I'd like to see you try it! Hallo! — what did you turn out that light for then? What the deuce ——"

"You said you wanted it out, did n't you?" said Vernon with sudden savagery. He felt himself becoming furiously angry. "Well, it *is* out — and if you speak again, by heaven, I'll break your head!"

Long after Waller's breathing proclaimed him asleep, Vernon lay on his narrow cot, wide awake, with a singular mixture of sensations pervading him, through which only one formulated itself clearly — he must, by hook or crook, get to the ball to-morrow night. It was impossible to have Kitty Valentine leave this side of the world thinking that he did not want to see her. How

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was it possible that he had let her leave him this evening under that impression? He had n't realized that his chance was passing until it was gone. *Was* he in love with Kitty? He did not know; he had n't had time yet to think about it; he only knew that she must not go away under a mistake — the idea was unbearable.

Was there ever such cursed obstinacy as Waller's! He was one of those tiresome people who stand on their rights, regardless of whether they want the rights or not. Waller had also, toward his friend, a little of the immemorial attitude of the elder brother, who considers any deprivation rather beneficial to the younger, as teaching him something he would n't learn otherwise. In this case Vernon must learn that if he made a compact he had, in honour, to abide by it. The two men were bound together, if not by real warmth of affection, by the ties of college acquaintance, a cheerful poverty under a similarity of aim, and Carlsen's good offices; even when one is waiting, like Vernon, on a position with an electrical company, one must still live.

Both Vernon and Waller had good introductions, and, perhaps, they indulged more

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earnestly in social life because of other restrictions. There had been a sense of joyous masquerading in those restrictions, as of something temporary, and known only to themselves, soon to come to an end; even this habit of a gentleman, shared with Waller, with its padded shoulders fitted perforce to the broader man, had seemed only a part of the joke—until now. It was a strangely disquieting thought that permanent restrictions could grow out of these temporary ones. Kitty Valentine — It was true what he had said to-night in the face of her going away, that he had thought it “had just begun.”

What had just begun? It seemed now as if, in the half-dozen times he had met her, there had been some immense waste of opportunity. After the fashion of mankind he had talked and danced much oftener with other girls, while secretly admiring her the most; this very evening he had let a couple of hours go by without seeking her. The attraction she had for him was strong enough to make him a little conscious; he deferred instinctively in giving way to it. He liked to watch her, taking secret note of her dark, loosely waving hair, the poise of her

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head, her small, oval face, the warm red of her lips, the changing colour of her speaking eyes, and the little white chin which she had a habit of propping delicately with one hand. There were other girls more beautiful than Kitty Valentine, but none who had such beautiful, exquisitely shod little feet. Her dress always conformed to her small person, with an effect of compact, yet rich, simplicity — nothing ever floated or tagged out from it; it seemed to give point to the repose of manner, that youthful womanliness which Vernon found indescribably endearing. She was inexperienced, but she had a mind; her utterances, even when they were light, were those of one who had a thought back of them — she knew what she meant. This last evening — Vernon's heart swelled when he thought of her words and her look of sweet deference. He was a modest fellow, who fled from praise for heroic actions, yet it is heart-warming sometimes to be recognized for what we are — he felt that she had spoken to that high quality in him which no one here cared whether he had or not; he was simply a presentable youth, useful for social purposes, with good looks, a rather distinguished bearing, and a some-

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what shy, yet winning, personality; and, at other times, one of many penniless grubbers in the under world. Penniless indeed! He glowered disgustedly through the darkness at the dim shapes of the packing-boxes, and the mound that was Waller's hunched-up sleeping figure. He had known that he was not in a position to make love to any girl — least of all one so shiningly well fortunate as Kitty Valentine. But he was going to see her at the dance before she went!

He slipped out of bed and felt noiselessly for the precious dress suit, folded it and put it under the mattress on his bed. Then he slept.

There were no words wasted between Vernon and Waller the next morning — the latter had a teasing, offensive manner before which the other bore himself with dignified loftiness. Usually Waller was dressed and off before Vernon rose, but to-day they went out to breakfast together, and came back step for step. All during the morning's work, whether he was taking inventories of lots, or getting the orders off, or even marking cases, Vernon kept his eye on Waller's movements, feeling also that Waller's eye was on him.

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It would be impossible to carry the clothes out through the place without Waller's "getting on" to it, but he had evolved a plan which promised to be easily successful — it *must* be successful, for it was fatally sure that it had to be that suit or no other — no dress coat or trousers for ready sale or hire ever came near the proportions of his height, his arms and legs; if this had not been the dire fact as regarded both men they would never have owned this garb between them. He meant, some time in the afternoon, to pack the suit into a valise, and lower it out of the back window to the narrow paved court below. The early darkness would cover it there, and he could easily carry it off later unseen through the passage-way, taking advantage of the Morpeths' standing invitation to dine and dress at their house.

The plan was excellent; there was only one bar to its execution — when Vernon, before lunch time, went into the back room and looked beneath his mattress for the reassurance of possession, the suit was no longer there. With flushed face and clawing fingers he searched behind the cots, around the boxes, among other clothing —

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he looked frantically out of the window down into the courtyard below — the suit was not there. While he had been leisurely planning it had vanished completely — Waller's face of half an hour before came to him, looking across a packing-case that was going down on the elevator. Vernon had the instant conviction that the suit had been on that elevator—whither going he had no means of discovering; when he went out into the office again Waller was no longer there, either, nor did he appear after luncheon. When Vernon inquired he was told that Mr. Waller had asked permission to go off for the rest of the day.

Vernon was usually a cheerful fellow, with a pleasant word for those who worked with him, but this afternoon he spoke to no one. The lines of his face were drawn; his head felt heavy and burning; his only coherent thought was a wild desire to get at Waller and choke the life out of him — Waller, who would see Kitty Valentine to-night. Mixed with the physical sickness of his anger was a dull confusion, a heavy inertness of the brain, as if all the joy of youth had come to an end in this fantastic, unnecessary denial. Why had n't he known

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before that he was going to care like this for her? Oh, he *had* known, but, fool that he was, he would not listen to the voice that had told him! He had left his opportunity until too late — until too late.

It was still with that feeling only of sullen submission to a leaden fate that he found himself, late in the day, sent on an unexpected errand across the river — there was a bill to be collected, yet with discretion. Not until he was on the return trip, after an interview that was not successful and yet not unsuccessful, according to the fashion of matters that *must* end on the spot and yet do not end there — it was not until the return trip on the ferryboat that that influence of the outer air, which no roof can cover, began to tell upon him. It was bitter cold; the red sunset across the bay did not warm the heavy snow-clouds above it, but the mere physical resistance to the elements seemed to take away a little from that unbearable pain at his heart. As he stood by the outer rail, braced for the sharp wind, which was driving the boat with the tide far out of her course, he found himself gradually aware of the presence of two men beside him; scraps of their conversation came inter-

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mittently to his ear. One of them was a large, smooth-faced man of the machine-politician type, with a thick, coarse voice. The other, shorter and much slighter, riveted Vernon's attention after the first glance. He was scrupulously dressed, in contrast to the rough business attire of the other; his frock coat and light trousers showed beneath the fur-collared overcoat. There was a flower in his buttonhole, and he wore a high hat and immaculate gloves. His face was thin and dark; he had a pointed black beard, and black eyes of sombre depth. The two men were talking of a notorious case which was being tried in court — a woman's fate hung in the balance. The man with whom she was dining alone had met his death from a pistol held in her hand, and whether by accident or design was the mooted point.

"If a chap is taken unaware like that ——" the larger man was saying, with a shrug of the shoulders.

"Well, he deserved what he got, anyway," said the other tersely. He broke off with a gesture of disgust that seemed to put away the whole matter and everything akin to it, including the man who had spoken. He

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pulled out his watch and looked at it anxiously.

"We'll be late getting in, I'm afraid."

"You're going over for ——"

Vernon lost the name.

"Yes — and it looks more like storming every moment now. I'll get a carriage for her."

"To go *that* little distance!"

The younger man turned on him fiercely.

"If you think I'd let *her* touch her foot to the ground ——" There was a very passion of reverence in his tone; he stopped suddenly and turned away again, this time with an odd effect, as he leaned on the rail, of putting the whole world behind him that he might be alone with the thought of the woman that he loved.

The old story of the traveller who apparently lived a lifetime, while gazing into a drop of water held out to him for an instant by a magician, has its actual prototype in those strange, momentary impressions which sometimes come to us regarding some person totally unknown — penetrative flashes, in which not only the character but the past history seems to stand vividly and extraordinarily revealed. Many of us can repro-

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duce at will the unforgettable face of some stranger, still instinct with meaning, though seen, it may be, years ago. Vernon received an overwhelming impression of the man beside him as one filled with an agony of loathing for the life that had been his and all that appertained to it, as beheld by the light of a passionate and adoring love for some white-souled girl whom his stricken fancy endowed with angelic attributes. His sombre eyes as they gazed before him seemed to see her alone, as if he had in truth withdrawn apart to where she was. A sense of the mightiness of love, and of its high transforming power, brought the moisture to Vernon's eyes, a quick stricture of the heart, that yet made the veins swell.

Love — like this stranger's — was not meant to be a straw, easily blown away, but a mighty weapon in the hands of a man who was strong enough to wield it.

What sort of a man had he been to-day? Suppose (and it might be!) that all these hours had been binding Kitty's heart to him as his to her? Suppose (and it might be!) that even now — for she could not go to him — she was waiting and longing for him to come to her, as a man had the right

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to come! He laughed, unconsciously, for pure joy. He had thought the knowledge of his own heart had come too late. Too late! To-morrow would be too late, indeed — but to-day — what there was left of it was still his. She was within reach, he had the use of his senses, he could move, walk, speak. What if he did not even know where she was stopping to-night, or where Waller and those clothes had vanished to, or that he did not know how to get any others — what if he had to fight, not giants (that were easy!), but this cursed intangibility! That entrancing vision of Kitty waiting for him, her white chin propped on her delicate hand, her lovely eyes full of tears, entreating him to leap over all his chains of poverty and circumstance, warmed him with the glow of last resolve.

“You darling! I’ll come sure enough,” he said to himself. “You’re mine, mine, mine! I won’t let you go to the end of the world without letting you know that first, and when you come back ——” His riotous fancy lost itself in the vision.

The boat jarred into the slip; the unknown man looked at Vernon for the first time, as one who recognizes a companion in a far

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country — then he disappeared in the crowd. Vernon went to the warehouse. Everyone had left. Neither Waller nor the dress suit was to be seen, though he hunted diligently once more for the latter. He made as careful a toilet as he could, and then, after waiting an hour for Waller's reappearance, went to the Morpeths'. He had a sudden hope that Morpeth's dress suit might fit him.

II

THE Morpeths were a married couple who lived in a very narrow brownstone house in a row that bulged with narrow, repellent bay-windows, which looked as if they had been squeezed out by the extreme need of space. With the exception of one other person, the Morpeths were Vernon's only intimate friends in town; the Mrs. Irving of whom Kitty had spoken was away. Helen Morpeth had spent several winters before her marriage in California, near Vernon's family, and her husband had been a member of the press in San Francisco before getting editorially afloat here. The Morpeths were

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given up to a domesticity little short of appalling to the unwedded; their every interest seemed to be bound up in the diet and health and attainments of their two infants, and the minor details of the household. The informal guest was always escorted to the cozy upstairs sitting room after dinner, where, kind as his hosts were, he felt merely as an accessory to an existence perfect without him. Helen Morpeth sewed with intermittent absentmindedness on little undergarments, while her husband, in a dilapidated house-jacket, pipe in mouth, talked disconnectedly as he came in and out, busy with the absorbing occupation of tinkering with doorknobs and putting "washers" in leaking faucets. Vernon, on those rare occasions when he had spent the night there, had been obliged to stay up until all hours in his own room reading, to get back his wonted tone.

But they were certainly kind. Helen came down welcomingly to see him now, in the absence of her husband, and turned the light up in a desolate, stiffly furnished drawing room, as long and narrow as a trolley car. Vernon experienced a wild desire to leave the house the moment he was seated in it. But Helen's tone as he

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explained his situation to her expressed a motherliness such as she might have used to her own little Ted.

"Why, certainly, Harry, you can have anything of Clarence's that you want. It's such a pity he was called away to-day to meet the Secretary of State — and just the night that he had set for putting up a shelf in the butler's pantry! But go upstairs to his room and try on everything he has. He's grown so much broader lately, as you say — and he's nearly as tall as you are; by letting things down a little — Be careful not to wake the babes."

Alas! not even by the most careful engineering could Clarence Morpeth's dress suit be made to fit Vernon. The trousers might possibly have been managed, but not the coat; putting it on was nothing to getting out of it again; he was trembling and weak in the knees when he was once more free, and tiptoed down the hallway past the rooms of the sleeping children to his hostess, waiting for him below.

"It's no use," he stated. "Mrs. Morpeth, if I can't get to the ball I'll have to see her some other way. I'd go as I am, but they would n't let me on the floor."

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"And you don't even know at what hotel she's stopping! If you knew that — but of course you might run all over town trying to find out. I'm so stupid!" Mrs. Morpeth knitted her brows. "By the way, why don't you go and see Candace Irving? She was saying this morning that you had n't been to see her for months. She has so many ideas!"

"I thought she was still away."

"No, she got back yesterday."

"*Well!*" said Vernon with delighted emphasis. He seized Mrs. Morpeth's hand. "Thank you a thousand times! You won't mind my running off immediately?"

Candace! As he tore along the street on his way to her apartment he felt as one who at last sees a star of hope. It had begun to snow very hard and fast, and the wind drove stingingly in his face. The wild night whipped his memory into lines mechanically repeated:

"Saint Agnes' Eve—Ah, bitter chill it was!"

Ah, bitter chill it was — Ah, bitter chill. The words seemed to bring a vague, blurred idea with them — an enchanted, impossible suggestion. Candace might give it shape. The very strength of his desire to

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see Kitty Valentine made it impossible for him to coherently plan any way to do it. It is not the man of action who is clever in the strategies of love—it takes the dreamer, the man of more feminine temperament, to plan competently. Vernon could only feel now that, if he could get a woman to help him, and that woman Candace Irving ———.

And she was out, after all, but the maid said she would be in at nine. It was another of the awful obstructions fate had put in his way to-day. If she should not be at home when he went there again ——— There were a couple of hours to be got through first; he plunged into them as into the fires of the lower regions. When he at last emerged from that under-world of blasting delay he was breathless, his head reeling. As he sat with tense expectancy in the parlour at last, after taking off his snow-wet overcoat, waiting for Candace to come in, the apartment seemed the very haven of his longing dreams, with its pretty, home-like appointments, the low, *used* chairs, the table with its leather cover and brass writing materials, the charming water-colours, Candace's work, upon the walls,

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the crimson workbag with a bit of embroidery hanging from it, and the low bookcase. The thought of his barrack quarters back of the office, shared with Waller, made him sick with revolt, and then fired him anew; just such a little home as this would he have with Kitty when she came back in a year!

If the room was a contrast to his abode, it was no stronger than the contrast now between Vernon and his hostess. Candace was a dark, slender woman, not very young, with a tender handclasp and a subtly caressing voice — she was proficient in the endearing art of welcoming a long-absent friend without any underhand ironies at his remissness. She had, indeed, a sympathetic quality so strong that it drew the mind of man instantly toward it; it seemed at times as if everyone who came near her did so in the fond hope of being propped up, metaphorically or actually, with sofa pillows. She put one behind Vernon's head now with her left hand as she laid the other in his, regarding with a surprised solicitude his burning eyes as she said:

"My dear boy, do lie back there comfortably. Are you ill? Why, what *have*

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you been doing? Your shirt and your necktie — your look as if you had been in the wars! What's the matter?"

"Everything," said Vernon. He raised his haggard eyes to hers with a tragic effort at a smile that turned into wild fierceness.

"Candace, I've no business to live, because I'm poor; I'm poor and I'm desperate, and I'm — in love, and getting deeper in love every minute." His voice sank. "It's torment! And she goes away to-morrow — for a year, and I can't get a chance to see her to-night and tell her how I love her. And I'll never get the chance again! She's so lovely that any man would ——" He stopped and stared before him.

"Is it Kitty Valentine?"

"Yes. How did you guess?"

"And she does n't know?"

"No. She thinks I don't want to go there to-night. I suppose she does n't even care for me. And yet, I've felt to-day that, if I only had the chance to *see* her ——! She's to be at the Club ball, and Waller and I ——" he found himself pouring out the story to her sympathizing ear, adding afterward:

"Since I left the Morpeths' I've 'phoned

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or been to seventeen hotels. Her people are just the kind to go to some little, old-fashioned hostelry nobody knows about, or they may be stopping with a friend, after all; it's beyond *me!* I went back to the office — I'd tried to eat dinner, but I could n't — and caught Waller, all dressed, going out. He'd had the suit at the tailor's getting pressed; if I'd *only* had the wits to think of that I could have got it. I can't seem to think of anything until it's too late! You ought to have heard him laugh, the great, husky brute! Well, he did n't look so pretty when I'd got through with him."

"And did n't you get the suit?" asked Candace.

Vernon shook his head. "Could n't. Not unless I'd stuck a knife into him somewhere and straightened him out. Oh, I wanted to fast enough" — he gazed at her seriously — "but, you see, it would have spoiled the suit for me."

"Mercy!" said Candace, staring. She began to laugh commiseratingly, and then checked herself. "Poor boy, you've been through a lot."

"There are two entrances to the hall — one on the Avenue, and the other around

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the corner," Vernon went on with apparent irrelevance.

"So that you could n't know at which one to wait for her?" she translated.

"Yes. I tell you now, Candace, I can't get in at the ball; that's settled for me. But I've got to see Kitty alone. If I could get her out ——" He rose and paced the floor. "I can't think how or where, but if I could see her alone, for a little, little while; if there was *any* place ——"

"Write her a note and ask her to give the supper dance to you — if she has an engagement, to break it. Ask her to come to the side door of the hall at midnight," said Candace rapidly. "We'll get a messenger boy to take the note and leave it with the maid in the dressing room for her — if Kitty's going away to-morrow, telegrams and messages are in order. You can carry my fur cloak and fur-lined shoes for her to slip over her things."

"And take her to a restaurant? Would that quite do?"

"No, *no!* Bring her to me. But don't tell her that — only ask her to save the supper dance for you and to come to the door. The supper will be *here!* You can

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get her back again before anyone knows she's gone — it's only a step around the corner. We'll decorate it here for her!"

His eyes glinted. "Candace, you're a jewel. *What* a plan! Oh, it's my dream — and beyond it. But ——" he sat down and took one of Candace's slim hands in one of his, smoothing it with the other. "Candace, you have nerve! But — but — will she come — at such a summons — on such a night? Will she come?"

"Only if she loves you," said Candace gently. Then her tone changed. "Harry Vernon, let go of my hand. I will *not* have you kissing it, pretending to yourself all the while that it's Kitty's! Oh, I know *you!*"

"It makes me feel so much better," argued Vernon pleadingly. But the next minute he had risen and flung his arms out wide. "If she does n't come —— Give me the pen and ink, Candace."

As he wrote the storm shook the windows and the sharp snow rattled on the panes. So wild was the night, so long the hours before Kitty could come — if, indeed, she came at all —— After the note was sent, Candace came once more to his rescue.

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"We 'll go out and get things to make the room look lovely for your girl."

He laughed, with a reddening face. "Like a sort of St. Agnes' Eve? Ah, Candace, you're a wonder — you know too much! *That's* what I dreamed!"

In after years, as Vernon looked back upon that night, he could never tell what really happened and what was but the creation of his wandering brain. It was true that he and Candace faced the storm hunting such places as were still open, where they could get "cakes and dainties" — and that they laughed and jested uproariously together; it was not true that strange and tragic phantoms leered up at him at every step, whispering that the next footfall would take him crashing down a sickening precipice. It was not true that Kitty was out in the storm defenceless, her whiteness invisible in the shrouding whiteness of the snow, as she fled from those phantoms, or that she shrieked hauntingly for aid in that wild shrieking of the wind that tore her away from his grasp.

It was true that he and Candace stood outside of the lighted hall and heard the whirl of the dance music within. It was

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true that Candace and he, after they came back to the apartment, turned the little room into a fairy palace with artful disposition of pink-fringed chrysanthemums and trailing vines, with softly-lighted candles on the mantel and on the low shelf around the room and on the table, gleaming with twisted iridescent glass, and golden round-globed oranges, and darkly crimson apples, and great purple clusters and pale green clusters of grapes, like smooth, glistening jewels, as wonderful as the enchanted fruit of dreams. The pink and green cakes, the dates, the raisins and the figs — they were real! But that ashy thing that walked beside Vernon — it was not true that it laid its pale fingers on everything he touched — that was not real. It was not true that it kept repeating to him louder than that wind that beat against the windows, and with a more deathly chill, “She will not get your letter; it was a thousand chances to one that she would. She never even went to the ball! No written word that you can ever send after her when she is gone will speak to her heart as your hand on hers would have spoken to it to-night. She will not get your letter — she never even went to the ball!

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Count yourself dead, dead to love — dead, dead! She is for some other, not for you. You will fade from her life as if you had never been."

That could not have been true, though it was so real. But it was true that Candace let him go out again because she could no longer keep him. He was leaving the room with her long fur wrap and the furred overshoes tucked under his arm when Candace called him back to put on his own hat and coat, she herself buttoning up the latter, as he waited unwillingly like one straining at the leash, his dark eyes alight, under his rumpled hair, and an uneasy, daredevil defiance in his smile. It was true that he waited under the side porch of the hall while the snow whirled past him — waited — waited. If the minutes were leaden before the clock struck twelve, each minute after that brought a horrible stab with it that sent the life dully ebbing. Oh, *that* torture was too real! Through all after-joy the stark, raw hurt of this endless waiting remained even when out of mind, coming back with the same unbearable pain at strange times and places. That was *too* true! And then, when he had given up

Just for Two

all hope, yet must stand there and hope still
— she came!

The time was already waning fast — and nearly over! They sat within the softly lighted room with its rows of candles shining out from the pink chrysanthemums and on the piled-up gleaming fruits on the enchanted table; his arms were around the whiteness and the warmth of her, and her head was on his shoulder, while on the other side of the drawn portières Candace played on her violin that she might not hear the words they said.

Kitty's voice thrilled.

"I can't believe that I'm really here with *you!*"

"But you are." (*Blest dreamer, lovely bride!*)

"Yes. I felt to-day — I kept feeling so strange, so lost in space, I did n't know why. And then — when I saw you — I was suddenly so *glad!* You seemed so perfectly splendid and wonderful to me! I would do anything you told me to, for you would never let me do anything I ought not."

"Never, never!"

"And you planned this all yourself?"

"Yes." (*O shades of the perjured!*)

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She looked at him with a surrender so innocent and childlike in its completeness that he averted his eyes from hers. "The likes of me!" he said to himself, with an odd shame. "The likes of *me!*"

"And if you care for me now," her tender voice went on, she put her hand against his cheek to turn his face toward her, "I want to say — I don't know how to say it — I can be a great deal nicer, Harry, than the way you've known me — just at *dances!* Every day I'm away from you I'll try and grow to be — nicer; more worth your loving."

The magic of St. Agnes' Eve was over, the lovers had fled into the storm once more, only to be parted, with Candace left smiling, a little wistfully, as one well used to forgetting that others had needed her, when they remembered it no longer. The candles were out, the table stripped bare, only the fringed, shadowy chrysanthemums still breathed pungently of joy.

But the enchantment still held for Vernon. He walked past the warehouse with his eyes fixed on a fairy vision, and bumped full into somebody, who after the shock of collision turned out to be Barney, the watchman.

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"*Hell-lo!*" said the latter, with lenient comprehension of tone. "Sure, what under hivin are ye doing down this way, Mr. Vernon? Turn yourself around, that's the good b'y, do!"

"Oh, Barney!" sighed Vernon, obediently retracing his steps, his eyes swimming and his gait uncertain, though he was only drunk with the intoxicant of love. He got up those dark stairs and stumbled over a paint-pot and crashed into a case of extract-bottles as he groped his way to the back room — there was no light but the faint light of the waning moon. He felt a sudden impulse of affection for his friend, sleeping, as usual, all hunched up in the farther cot.

"Waller! Old chap!" He shook the massive form and then dodged the arm that shot out automatically from the shoulder. "Put your arm down, can't you? I've got something to tell you. See here, I'm sorry I lammed you to-night; you can keep that dress suit forever. But I've got something to tell you." His voice rose deliriously. "O Waller! I'm so happy! O Waller! old fellow, old fellow! O Waller!"

"Great heavens!" said Waller. He sat up with a jerk. "If you don't stop this

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awful O Wallering — Take your head out of the bedclothes. Get up out of here. You blame kid! If you don't let me go to sleep I 'll kill you — and I 'll kill you *now!*"

"Oh, never mind," said Vernon absently. He reached over to a chair and sat there with his cheek resting on the shoulder of his coat, still sweet with the fragrance of the violets where her head had lain.

The waning light showed only the outlines of the cots, and the stove, and the bathtub with the sponges above it, and lost itself in the thick darkness of the warehouse beyond; but Vernon sat bathed in a flood of luminous glory, that spread itself dazzlingly on before him, filled with exquisite hopes, dear, unspoken joys — an ecstasy of happiness, so deep, so tender and so wonderful — on how little (O heavenly powers, on *how* little, how *very* little) a year!

9

The Path to Spain



The Path to Spain

Miss Rosamond Blakeley speaks:

WELL, good evening! Are you here at last? I almost thought you were n't coming.

Oh, it's you, is it, Mr. Rodman? You gave me such a start when you spoke! You looked so like Jack Terry as you came across the sand. The moon was under a cloud at the time.

I had no *idea* anyone saw me slipping out here.

No, I suppose you *can't* help seeing a white dress.

Oh, if you mean that my hair is like a beacon light, I don't call that very polite.

Now, never mind what the moonlight makes it look like. I know it's red, anyway.

If you were looking for the rest of the crowd, Mr. Rodman, they've all gone down the beach. You need n't mind leaving me at all. I always call this little corner up here in the rocks my seat; it shuts you out from

Just for Two

everything but the water. I just love to sit here by myself and watch the waves breaking into white foam on the reef out there, and the moonlight making that golden path across the water.

Oh, dear, yes, straight across to Spain. That 's what everybody says, don't they?

Why, yes, of course I think it 's interesting, but it 's not exactly new.

Now, please don't let me keep you if you were going on farther. I 'm sure you want to find Miss Gray! She had the most fetching way of looking at you to-night, as she went past, with those big violet eyes of hers.

No, *much* prettier than mine.

Well, if you did n't see her, I did. I know you 'd like her if you only tried to get acquainted with her; you ought to take every opportunity.

Why, yes, of course, sit down if you want to. I 'm sorry there is n't room here by me.

Oh, no, I don't *need* your cap behind my back. The rock is quite comfortable.

Why, thank you very much, but I don't need it. Is n't there somebody coming just over the rocks?

Oh, *Jack!* Do you know, I mistook Mr.

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Rodman for you a few minutes ago. He has been so kind, keeping me company here.

Oh, don't get up, Mr. Rodman! No, *don't* go, really. I wish you would n't!

Ah, did n't I *tell* you all the time I knew you were going on farther? I hope you'll find the one you're looking for!

Oh, I was *so* afraid he'd stay! He does say the most frightfully hackneyed things.

Why, Jack, you could n't have *told* him to go. It would have been ——

Yes, but really he is an awfully good fellow. There was something almost sweet, I thought, in the way he looked at us before he went off, as if he wanted us to have a happy time. He has a very nice back, don't you think?

Very well, we won't talk about him any more.

I'll just move up a little — there.

Is n't the moonlight perfectly wonderful?

Yes, right across to Spain. There's something in the words that just draws you, is n't there?

Oh, you must n't take my hand. No, I don't want you to. I know I did let you hold it before, but you must n't do it any more.

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No, I don't think I *ought* to let you.

Because?

Well, because I feel that I don't know you well enough.

No, *not* well enough to let you hold my hand.

No, not even four fingers — nor three — nor two.

Oh, Jack, how perfectly absurd!

Well, if my little finger can do you any *good*. It's so silly to have them hooked together this way.

Listen to the water lapping on the rocks. Is n't the moonlight delicious!

No, it does n't make me look like that at all.

If my hair really *was* silver you would n't like me a bit, for then I'd be wrinkled and old, and if I was wrinkled and old I could n't look beautiful to you.

Oh, do you believe *that*? Yes, the soul *is* a wonderful thing; that does n't change, no matter how old you get. If you have a beautiful soul it keeps you beautiful always. I think it's a lovely thing to believe.

Yes, of course, you see it in your mother; but *she* has so much charm, anyway. She was so perfectly dear to me that day I met her. She talked about you all the time, and

The Path to Spain

said how much she'd always wished for a daughter. She had such an understanding way! I think some people that you only meet once seem to understand you so much better than your own family do. Of course my family love me, but they are always picking at me for something. Just when I love my mother or my sister most they tell me my hair is one-sided, or that the library needs dusting. They don't seem to realize how much one needs an uplift in life.

Oh, if *I* give an uplift to *you*!

If I could only help anyone to grow better! I think it is the most beautiful thing in the world. That is what I want to do, to *help* someone.

Oh, how long have you been holding my hand?

Yes, you *are*.

Let it go, please; let it go.

No, you *know* I can't take it away. You won't let me!

Well, then, just for three minutes. I never *saw* such beautiful moonlight; it's heavenly, and the waves plashing upon the reef.

. . . Don't let's talk.

There are times when I only want to sit and dream, and think of life. Just before you

Just for Two

came out here I was thinking how beautiful it would be to go and teach the lepers, or something. Those are the times at home when mother always wants me to do the marketing. I think meat is *so* dreadful! I can't eat my dinner if I've been to a butcher's shop and seen them cut up things; but of course I don't let her know that or she'd go herself.

No, she *is n't* inconsiderate. She's just too unselfish for words, and I'm a horrid pig. I don't *care what* I said before. Nobody shall speak like that about my mother!

Oh, please don't begin to talk that way. Oh, *please* don't! I'd like to go back to the house now.

No, please don't say *any* more.

No, *don't* do that! Let me go. I know someone will see us.

No, I don't like it. I'm not used to having *anybody's* arm around me.

Oh, no-o-o! There's no one I like *better* than you.

No, indeed. Why, I never thought of *him*! Oh, you're very much mistaken. He does n't care for me at all!

Well, I can't help what you *heard*. I was as bored as I could be, all the time.

The Path to Spain

Oh, what a silly boy to mind that! How about the day you took Ellen Steele out sailing?

No, I was n't the least bit jealous!

Yes, I know how that is. You think you may care for people until you meet the *one* person, and then all the rest seem ——

Exactly.

Do you know, it's made me feel perfectly sick lately, because last summer ——

No, I don't want to tell you, after all.

No, I *can't* tell you!

Well, then. Oh, *please* don't listen! I've been perfectly sick because I let Tom Van Blarcom cut off a little curl of my hair — a little curl by my ear — the left one. I suppose he's forgotten now that he has it. He begged me for it so much, and he had a knife in his pocket, and ——

No, nobody else *at all* — never.

Oh, *dear!* If I *must* then —— Well, when I was at boarding school there was a boy at the academy and we wrote notes to each other — awfully silly, love-y notes — and we were to be married some day; but he went away and I never heard of him again.

No, of *course* that was nothing. The

Just for Two

absolutely *only* other one — Oh, I've just hated to tell you this!

Don't make me tell you — please don't! Oh, *dear!*

Well, it was Nell Franklin's brother, the Lieutenant. She's always talking of him. She gave me his picture when he was in Manila. I went wild over it. There!

Yes, I did — *wild!* When I looked at it his eyes seemed to speak straight to my heart. He seemed — oh, I can't tell you, so noble and strong and magnificent and good and heroic — like Lohengrin. I used to go upstairs and take it out from under my glove box ever so many times a day and — oh, it's *too* dreadful and silly. I know you won't like me any more. I used to — kiss it. Yes, I *did!* And when I saw him, it gave me the most awful shock. He was too loathsomely ordinary for anything. Mother took me to Atlantic City the next week, I was so gone to pieces. I tore that picture into bits.

Oh, I've such a weight off my mind now that I've really told you everything. I've wondered and wondered what you'd think of me! Why are you smiling?

Well, I think it was bad enough. I felt as

The Path to Spain

if *your* life had been so ideal — after what your mother said about you. I'm sure that you *never* —

What?

Oh!

How queer — how — how very *odd!* I had no idea that —

Two years — as long as that!

So then she sent everything back —

Oh, that was the *next* one.

OH!

No, I'd no idea of it.

I think I don't want to hear any more about her.

Yes, of course, it's noble of you to confess, but —

I think I'd rather you did n't tell me about *her*, either.

No, not about *any* of them.

No, *don't*.

Well, maybe I might have heard of it from someone else; but it makes me feel so dreadfully queer to think that you ever cared for anyone.

The moonlight's so bright, is n't it? I wish you had n't *told* me.

Well, you *thought* you cared.

Oh, yes, I suppose there *is* a difference.

Just for Two

Yes, if it makes you realize how little all that was compared to —

Oh, yes, you *say* that, but — *Why* did you tell me anything?

Let me go back to the house!

No, I just feel badly because I'm disappointed in you. I don't want to be *near* you.

I don't want to be near you *at all*. Let me get up. *Let* me!

Well, then, I don't want you to ever tell me things I hate!

Promise!

No, my cheek is n't wet — it is n't.

Oh, no. I don't want to hurt you, of course. No, I don't want to *hurt* you.

Oh — oh! Do you care for me as much as that? So much as *that*?

Oh, yes, I do like you.

Why, I'm speaking very loud.

Yes, I do like you.

Yes, I'll like you *always*.

I don't see what *more* you want me to say.

No, I could n't say any more. I never have to anybody.

Oh, is n't the moonlight beautiful and strange!

Yes, "not the path to Spain, but the path to heaven." Oh, it's for there, as well as for

The Path to Spain

this life, is n't it? Oh — forever! No matter what happens to you — or to me —

It means so *very* much, does n't it? It frightens me a little.

I'm not trembling because I'm cold, only because — Oh, Jack, dear Jack, I love you with my whole heart!

The Wife



The Wife

THAT'S Mrs. Ray — the smaller one, with dark hair and the short-waisted pink Empire gown — she 's standing directly under the chandelier, laughing. She looks pretty now, when she shows her dimples, but those straight eyebrows and that square chin give her a very — *decided* expression when her face is in repose. I don't often speak to her; sometimes she knows you, and sometimes she does n't — it 's a manner that stands very much in her way with getting pupils, I 've heard, though she has such a fine voice. *Would* you think she 'd want to be here to-night, with all that in the evening papers about her husband, and the divorce, and his marrying that woman to-day the minute it was granted? Everybody's pictures were in the *Flare!*"

The speaker was Mrs. Veen, a thin, sharp woman in billowy white satin flounces, and a large amethyst necklace with enormous pendants like pagodas on her lean neck; she took surreptitious glances over it at the attire of

Just for Two

her companion, while the curious gaze of the latter was focused on Mrs. Ray. Mrs. Stollway was fresh-coloured and short and plump. At these receptions of the Conservatory pupils the costumes were apt to be varied; Mrs. Stollway wore a high, brown silk, made by the dressmaker in her native up-state town; it seemed to have a plumpness of its own irrespective of the figure of its satisfied wearer. No one, Mrs. Stollway felt, had better lace than that in the collar and cuffs which unimaginatively trimmed the front of the bodice, the collar above and the cuffs below, as if displayed for sale upon a very bulging brown card. She turned around now to ask:

“She did n’t get the divorce, did she?”

Mrs. Veen shook her head, unmindful of a large woman dressed in plaid, who was leaning over on the other side, patently striving to catch every word.

“No; she’s principled against divorce — not that she did n’t have *cause* enough, goodness knows! How she could have endured all she did I can’t see — there seemed a lack of refinement about it to me. He went away two years ago, but of course he might have come back at any time. I always heard that she was crazy about him when they were

The Wife

married; that was eight years ago. Of course he was very handsome and talented; you could n't help knowing when he was around, *but* ——” Mrs. Veen's tone was expressive; she paused momentarily to control her disgust. “He got the divorce, for desertion! There's never been a *breath* against her, but you can get a divorce for anything out West where he is. That man behind her is Grant McIlroy, her lawyer; his sister's devoted to Mrs. Ray. I should n't wonder if now ——”

Esther Ray — in her pink chiffon, her small head held high on her round, white throat, the light from above shining in her upturned, lustrous eyes and on her round white arms, which still had a sort of babyishness in their soft curve — Esther knew, while she talked gaily to the group around her, that everybody out of earshot was saying the same things, wondering how she could front the gaze of the world to-night, and wondering if, now that she was legally free, she would marry Grant. Nobody knew that the bravery which was one of her undoubted characteristics, and for which she was always being praised (the bravery of earning her own livelihood, of living alone, of helping others, the bravery of

Just for Two

being consistently cheerful, proudly silent as to her own affairs) — that this had failed her to-night. She had come out to the mixed assemblage of the musicale because she had n't had the courage to stay at home and face the knowledge that, in deed and in truth, she was no longer a wife; it gave her a strange sensation of lost identity, of having no place in the world. She had sent Stanley away from her, herself, two years ago; she had refused to live with him longer, unless — All these months, even while she had dallied with the prospect of an imagined freedom, which her friends coveted for her, she knew now that she had been hoping, hoping that in spite of everything — What was it that she had hoped? It was all at an end.

“Don't you want to sit down somewhere with me? Victor is going to sing.”

It was Grant's kind voice; as usual, he was near her whenever she needed help.

“Why, thank you; that's just what I'd like,” she answered at once. The downright expression that characterized her face was matched by a sort of downright frankness of good-fellowship in her manner, such as a woman may have who has grown up in friendly and usual companionship with boys

The Wife

and men. But this cheerful downrightness and good-fellowship impressed one after a while as masking some mysterious depth of melancholy, as if under her decision there lurked uncertainty, and under her assured brusqueness there lay the natural tremulousness of a woman, as the darkness of a pool may show itself through the sunlight. She smiled frankly at Grant now, moving away with him to a chair by a group of palms, where she could look, half unseen, down the long room.

There was no chair for Grant, but he stood beside her, where she could talk to him or not, as she chose. He was one of those men, of rather commonplace appearance, who achieve a peculiar distinction by a quality of unobtrusive consideration for others — a quality made up in Grant's case from quick observation, an extremely kind heart, and almost faultless tact. There was no society in which he was not welcomed, though he was too busy to go out a great deal; to find Grant unexpectedly of a party always gave a heart-warming surprise. Both men and women of the most varying kinds spoke of him with proprietary affection — he seemed to be the particular discovery of each person who liked

Just for Two

him. He was never in the remotest degree subservient, but so delicately subordinate was his own personality as a rule that it gave Esther a slight shock to feel some indescribable change in him, as if, in spite of his usual quietly controlling will, there was an eagerness in his eyes, a warmth in his manner; in the very way in which he leaned toward her there was some new, possessive recognition of her. In all the time in which he had attended to her affairs there had been no word or look that spoke of him as anything but a friend — a dear and tender friend, but, scrupulously, no more; if she had known that he cared for her in any other way it was only as women do know such things, counting on what they do not wish to recognize. The slight shock she experienced now had in it a quick sense of resentment, which she quenched as quickly. Why should he not show her openly that he loved her? He had a right to show it if he wanted to; there was nothing in the way, there was no suspicion of insult — she was no longer a wife.

Esther, sitting there with the palms for a background, with Grant standing proprietarily beside her, looked down the glittering length of the room lined with people in which every

The Wife

face, as her eyes rested upon it, seemed to have been just averted from hers. Victor, at the piano, was singing something operatic, very difficult, and much too high for his voice, which, naturally a good baritone, was being "cultivated" far beyond its limits, with fell effect. Esther wished that he would stop; the voice grated on ears that had been tuned to the charming melody of Stanley's voice — for Stanley could sing! He did everything with a careless grace that fascinated — how long it had been before she could shake off the spell! They had been young when they married, beautiful, passionately in love. Even now she felt the glory of that morning of life, the joyous comradeship, the intimacy, the arrogance of their happiness! She could see Stanley's blue-black hair, his black eyes, his audacious lips, his boyish, wilful, care-free expression, which could change so easily into hard obstinacy. His personality was so strong that he seemed more real now than all this roomful of people.

When had he begun to change? He was always restless, but after the baby had come — and gone! — things became gradually different; she had supposed, even while she

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agonized, that it was only a phase, that he would be again the Stanley whom she had married — next week or the week after. Man though he was, he had the brutal cruelty of the boy, who feels no hurt himself; there were nights when she was waiting for him to come home when she wept with a misery that seemed as if it must rend soul and body — she had cried too much! Yet, if he had a day, an hour of his old self, he fascinated her still, until — Most people thought he had left her voluntarily; only she knew that she had herself sent him away. What was the use of going back over all that now? Had she, for these two years, really been cherishing the hope that he would return to her, clean and whole? The remembrance of his face, black and lowering, when he left her, should have killed that idea — his perverseness would never brook coercion; *that* sent him inevitably in the other direction.

That he had sought for a divorce and married on the day on which he had obtained it was, she knew, as much for a defiance to her as to please himself — it was like saying, *Now see what you 've done!* He was married to-day. Well, if he *could* do it — then it was entirely best this way. She must get some

The Wife

new hold on life for herself; that was the positive, necessary thing now.

The singer had ceased, amidst a buzz of conversation; a young man who was laughingly protesting against using his own light accomplishments was being forced down on the music stool; the next moment his rich, youthful tones were swelling through the room, gaining an instant silence of appreciation, though the song was a hackneyed one, which had lost its place among popular favourites six or seven years before.

“Every morn I bring thee violets —”

Esther rose as if blindly; she felt as if she would never reach the hall. It was Grant who gathered up her fan and scarf and went beside her through the room, talking gaily, as she dimly realized, to cover the abruptness of her exit.

“Do you want my sister to come to you?” he asked in a low voice as they reached the stairs, the lower steps of which were filled with couples who rose to give her way. But she was past speech; she could only shake her head as she fled upward to the cloak room. The maids had left it unguarded, to serve at supper-time — the huddled heaps of hats and coats made vague, strange, crouching outlines

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in the gloom. Esther cowered down in a corner as the tempest overwhelmed her; she wept as one lost in that flood.

After a while she heard the hurried step of someone evidently seeking her. A soft hand touched her shoulder — a form sank down beside her, with both arms around her.

“Nelly!”

“Poor, *poor* darling; poor Esther! It was too much for you to come to-night. Put your head on my shoulder. Grant said you told him not to send me to you, but he did, after a while. You see, anyone might come up and find you like this.”

“I know; I know. I’m trying to stop — it will be over in a minute. I did not think myself so weak. It is n’t that I care — any more — for *him* — that was over and done with long ago; it was only — that song — he — it brought back ——”

“Yes, dear; yes.” Nelly’s warm cheek was pressed to the wet one of her friend. Beneath Nelly’s gentleness was the hot, vindictive resentment that she always felt at any mention of Stanley Ray. “Thank heaven! Esther’s done with him now forever,” she said to herself. After a moment she murmured:

The Wife

"Don't you want to go home ? Would you like to have Nelly go with you ?"

"Yes."

"Grant thought perhaps you would. He has the carriage ready by this time." Nelly was busy as she spoke, helping Esther to rise, putting her wrap around her. Every motion of Nelly's slender figure, seen by the shrouded light, was instinct with a brooding tenderness; her small oval face was eagerly pitying. Esther leant toward her ministrations as a child might, all her usual dominance shattered into meekness. Nelly piloted her down the stairs, where the rising couples all had plates in their hands now; there was a cheerful clatter of spoons down the hall, only a hollow-eyed, high-boned, extremely thin foreign gentleman standing against the wall seemed to be still tragically waiting for his belated portion.

It was Grant who helped his sister and Esther into the carriage—even in that brief moment his healing kindness seemed enveloping, something gratefully warm to a shivering spirit.

"Won't you come with us ?" Esther asked.

"No; not to-night. By the way, I have n't told you that I've got to go away to-morrow.

Just for Two

I won't be back for two months. I'll come and see you then — the very first thing — if I may."

"Yes, do."

He put his hand over her gloved one in a comprehending, supporting clasp of farewell, and she impulsively clasped her other hand on top of his before he closed the carriage door.

It was like him, touchingly penetrative, to know that she would want only Nelly with her now — yes, she would want only Nelly — now, but afterward — The very gentleness of this temporary abnegation seemed to convey, with exaltation, the force of his love for her.

It was so strong that it was like an arresting current to memory. She drove along in the winter night. The air was cold but sparkling; the brilliant electric lights along the icy streets, the stir and bustle of the pleasure-seeking crowds, the crush of carriages and automobiles, the crisp clang of the trolley cars, and a queenly moon soaring high above gave her a feeling that she had left that terrible, lonesome misery far behind. What was it that had overcome her so entirely? What she knew now she had known, virtually, for a long time. She sat up straight, with the

The Wife

accustomed downrightness in her eyes; she had a quick, unusual longing for Grant's presence, as if with him by her side now she might continue stimulated and unremembering. Yet, if he had been there, she would probably have felt again that queer sensation of revolt.

"Here we are already," said Nelly. "May I come in with you for a few minutes? It's early yet."

"I was hoping that you would," said Esther.

II

THE apartment, a narrow, oblique strip like a shelf, on the eleventh floor, tiny as it was, had a large outlook; it fronted on a square that lay far below, filled with trees; through the window, before Esther pulled down the blind, one saw the broad expanse of the moon-filled sky above the park, and the arc-light on a tower beyond.

"It's the one thing I mind — unlocking the door and coming in here by myself," said Esther. "I always leave the shades pulled

Just for Two

up when I go out in the evening, so that the light from the tower will keep it from being stone dark when I enter — that gives me the most frightful sensation! I feel for an instant as if I were actually alone on earth.”

She laughed, but her bosom swelled as she spoke. She put the subject away from her with a gesture. “Take off your cloak, dear. I’m going to light up the gas logs; small as they are, they’re better than nothing. There! And I’ll make some tea. We’ve neither of us had anything this evening. I don’t do much housekeeping, but I can manage that.”

“I can stay only a few minutes.”

“It won’t take long.” She caught up the folds and flounces of her pink chiffon and pinned them into a fluffy knot at one side, showing the silk petticoat and small, white-shod feet with piquant effect, as she went back and forth from the little kitchen. Her eyes and hair looked unusually dark, her cheeks were flushed — there was a sudden, excited brilliance about her. Yet there was that suggestion of the mood below the mood that was characteristic of Esther, and despite the child-like contour of her arms and her small, round figure she had the unmistakable air of the

The Wife

married woman in distinction from Nelly, who, nearly as old as she, was as patently unmarried.

The apartment seemed extraordinarily at variance with the individuality of its owner, as Nelly, a natural home-maker, gazed around it. She had been there only once before; Esther had not encouraged visitors. Nelly felt overpoweringly the dulling, negative aspect of the place; she could not have stayed in it for twenty-four hours. Esther had lived there for over two years, and it still looked as if she had merely stopped for the night, on her way to somewhere beyond. There was a small oak table, a leather-covered lounge with one meagre drab pillow, a drab "art square" on the floor, a couple of straight chairs besides the uncushioned one in which Nelly sat, and a trunk in the corner of the room. There was no hint, in books, or sewing-work, or arrangement, of homelike occupancy. The bedroom beyond seemed as bare, save for a few necessary toilet articles on the dressing table, among which stood a faded photograph of Stanley Ray, heavily framed in silver, and, hanging on the wall, a head in water colors of a lovely little boy — Esther's dead child.

To one who knew of Esther's colour-loving

Just for Two

temperament, her old enthusiasm for the fitnesses and luxuries of life — as shown still by her toilet, which through all bodily and mental vicissitudes was charmingly and even richly appointed — to one who knew this side of Esther's character the aspect of the apartment spoke pathetically of a woman who, when she was alone at the end of her public day's work, had no energy to live up to anything, and whose weeks passed by unheeded while she still existed transitorily.

She unconsciously bore out this idea as she came in with the little tea-tray, looking around as she set it down on the table.

"I think I must bestir myself and begin to live like other people; I'll hire a piano — I've been doing all my practising at the Conservatory — and have 'evenings.' That chair you're sitting in is horribly uncomfortable; I've lots of cushions and books and things in my boxes, and I'll get them out this week. You take sugar and lemon, don't you?"

"Yes," said Nelly. She watched her friend's movements as she carefully poured the tea. There was a peculiar charm about Esther, which one did n't expect, when she was engaged in any material office for one's

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comfort; she seemed to bring all her intelligence to bear upon the service because it was for one she loved.

Nelly could not help saying, "I wish Grant were here!"

"Yes, I wish that, too. Why did n't he come, anyway? Oh, Nelly, he's done so many things — he's managed that I should be spared so much. I want to tell you — I can't tell him, I just choke up when I try to — what it has been to me, what it was just to-night, to feel that there was a man to stand between me and the world."

"That's where he wants to stand always, dear — between you and the world," said Nelly in a low voice.

The sharp colour flooded Esther's face.

"Esther, you've known it was so. He could n't speak before, but now — He's not rich, of course; I think it hurts him for the first time that he is n't; it takes so long really to get ahead in the law. He would like to be able to give you everything on earth. If it were n't for mother and me he'd have more."

"Nelly!"

"If you knew him as we do, how noble, how self-sacrificing he has been — how all his

Just for Two

life, ever since he was a boy of fourteen, he has had to give up for other people — all the burdens he's had to carry ——” Nelly stopped, with the tears in her eyes; through her own emotion she had a vague sense of his being slightly lessened in interest to Esther by her words. Abnegation is seldom a winning quality to a woman; it is not the man who gives up but the man who compels who is usually rewarded. She went on bravely: “But I don't think you'd lack for anything. He'd go without his overcoat to buy you slippers, and make you feel that he was all the warmer without it — he really *would* be warmer! And he's so *dear* — and so strong! He could carry you a mile and not know it. He has such a way of making you laugh! If he had a house of his own, even if it was a small one, he'd be so happy that ——”

“You'll be telling me next how he likes his egg boiled,” said Esther defensively, as she set her cup down and leaned over with her elbows in her lap and her square chin resting in her hands, her eyes under their straight black brows looking into the thin yellow and blue flame of the gas logs.

“Esther!” said Nelly in a different voice. She took the plunge. “I know you will

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never speak of — *that man* — but this time *I* am going to speak! You have always said that you did n't believe in divorce, but you *are* divorced; you are free, in spite of yourself, now that he's married again. How you can be anything but *glad* ——” Try as she might to speak coolly, the wonderment and contempt that she felt for any other point of view crept into her voice. “Why, *everybody* knew what you went through; everyone knew what kind of a man he was — that the blame was all on his side.”

“Oh!” said Esther, painfully, in a low voice. Her eyes had a sadness of introspection that seemed to set her very far off. “When you're married — as *we* were married — nothing's ever ‘*all* on one side.’ I did n't realize it when I should have realized — girls marry with such a self-centred view of life! No, dear, I won't belittle myself or my rightness of intention, but it's true that the fault was n't all on one side — it's my greatest pain as well as my greatest comfort to see that now.”

“And is it possible that after all you've gone through — when he's actually married to-day — that you still care for him?” asked Nelly. She rose as she spoke, trembling

Just for Two

with wrath and repugnance; she tried to fasten the braided loops of her long gray cloak with fingers that slipped over them clumsily.

Esther shook her head. "Oh, no; I got over caring — as you mean — long ago." She rose also, and took Nelly's hands in hers. "But if he was entirely as — you — think, I could never have cared at all, you know; the man I married ——" She stopped; her lips moved dumbly as if trying to break the wifely fetters that bound them. "It's always hard for me to talk of him to anybody — people don't understand. Nelly!" Her voice sank to a whisper. "Do you know that ever since our little Robert died he has never forgotten the day; he has brought or sent flowers every year to lay on that *darling* grave. Even *yesterday* — they came just the same."

As soon as she had said the words, she felt instantly as one does who has nerved oneself to make a tremendous revelation that means nothing to the person confided in. Nelly's mutinous expression told plainly that no hint of Esther's feeling reached her consciousness. Yet her gaze softened after a minute.

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"Esther, you're so tired," she said generously. She threw the cloak from her. "You must n't stay up a moment longer. I'm just going to see you safe in bed before I go, or else you'll sit up all night. Your hall door locks itself when you go out, does n't it? Then that's all right. I'm going to be your maid."

"It's absurd for me to let you," said Esther faintly; the strength seemed all to have gone from her. She submitted passively while Nelly unhooked, and untied, and removed the white slippers and stockings, slipping the nightgear on her and brushing out and braiding Esther's beautiful long, dark hair. There was a deftness and gentleness in Nelly's touch indescribably soothing; she accompanied her offices with little murmurs of direction and endearment.

When Esther was finally established in bed with all the last little services performed for her, she pulled Nelly down so that Nelly's cheek rested against hers.

"You're so sweet to me," she whispered with the voice of one painfully spent. "You don't know what luxury this is, to lie here and have the window opened for me and the lights put out."

Just for Two

"Don't try to talk," said Nelly, with a touch that subtly conveyed some new, intimate possessiveness, like an echo of Grant's manner earlier in the evening. "I want you to go straight off to sleep." She put her soft virginal lips to those of her friend. "Good night!"

The moon had set, but as she looked back the light from the tower shone through the window upon the picture of the child, with the outline of Esther's shadowy form stretched out below. On the dressing-table the photograph in its silver frame had been accidentally pushed over, and lay face downward.

The elevator man smiled greetingly to Nelly as she descended in the car in company with a hatless woman whom, as she now remembered, she had seen gazing disapprovingly at Esther at the musicale earlier in the evening; a noticeable person, with a triple chin and an elephantine form clothed in green and white plaid. Nelly's eye, fascinated, followed the joinings of the pattern, and wondered distastefully at the thought of this person living under the same roof with Esther. The elevator man touched his cap as Nelly stepped into the

The Wife

hall, leaning forward with a deferential intimacy.

"She all right? I thought she did n't look so well when youse went up."

"Who? Oh, Mrs. Ray! Yes, she's all right," said Nelly reassuringly, touched by something in the man's manner.

She could not look back into the room that she had left, where a woman, with a shawl huddled around her, knelt by the open window, her cheek on the freezing sill, gazing unseeingly into the night while her lips drew in that sharp, bitter air which that sharper pain at her heart rendered necessary for her life.

III

IT WAS two months later when Grant came to see her, on his return from the West. Winter still held iron sway: the pavements were black with glaring, icy stretches; the trees in the square were embedded in a stone-like bastion of snow; the red sun setting in the west made the scene colder and more stonily forbidding. Yet Grant had the spring

Just for Two

in his heart—through ice and snow he saw the leaves budding. Something of it in his face warmed the interest of the woman who was waiting with him for the elevator — a large woman with a triple chin. “I heard you asking for Mrs. Ray,” she said sociably.

“Yes.”

“She’s a neighbour of mine — on the floor above. I often say to her, ‘Mrs. Ray, if you feel lonesome at any time, day or night, you rap on your floor and I’ll come up.’ My little boy is taking vocal from her — he thinks the world and all of Mrs. Ray. When he cut his leg she brought him jelly every day.”

“She is very kind,” said Grant.

“She got her piano in last week. I’d never heard her sing before; she renders delightful,” pursued his companion. Her manner had in it something at once defensive and protecting, which seemed to be shared by the elevator man. He scanned Grant’s pleasant, homely face, with evidently a satisfactory result. “You’ll find her bell to the right; she give orders that you was to be sent up,” he announced hospitably.

Grant had been in Esther’s little drawing room once before with Nelly. He noted with quick pleasure the change in it now; a hun-

The Wife

dred little touches transformed it from a bare lodging into a home. The window-boxes, filled with things softly green, the open piano, the pictures, the usable books and belongings, all spoke of a woman's presence, and when she came quietly into the room, in a dark blue gown with a long string of pale pink corals hanging down to her waist, he knew that the place was changed because she was.

She was subtly younger in some way that he could n't analyze; her downrightness and her air of decision seemed to have under them a new and sympathetic quality, her eyes had a beautiful expression of inquiring gentleness below their straight brows. She was delightfully glad to see him, putting her left hand quite unconsciously for an instant over the one that clasped hers in greeting, and leaning toward him slightly as they talked of his trip, or what had happened to her in his absence — she was getting so many pupils! She had lighted the gas logs, and their thin, bluish flame darted into the darkening corners of the room; down the high window the electric light peered through the "gradual dusky veil." From far below came that ever-present clang of the trolley

Just for Two

cars, distinct in the frosty air. There was a pause in the conversation as she sat bent musingly forward, and Grant's eyes, with flashes in them, brooded on her downcast face as if they could never leave it again. His hands trembled slightly, and his tone had changed when he spoke again.

"Esther, you know why I've come. It's to tell you that I love you — only I can't tell it. If you knew how I've suffered in seeing you suffer, how passionately I've longed ——" He stopped short, and drew a quick breath at the gaze with which she fronted him. "Esther, you don't mean ——" He set his lips, as one who faces a deadly weapon. "Esther, you don't mean — that I must n't say it, that — you — can't ——"

"I'm afraid — just that."

His forehead flushed darkly. "You don't mean that you still care for that *brute*!"

She winced. "No; oh, *no*!"

"Then why — what reason can you have?" He gazed at her with tense inquiry, and then spread out his hands in bitter dismissal of the thought. "Of course, it's absurd to say that — there's no reason why you should love me. I've not much to offer, heaven knows."

"*Please!*"

The Wife

"If I had been rich — but that could have made no real difference with *you*."

She bent her regard toward him with the old downrightness, as if seeking to recall some former attitude of mind.

"Yes, it might perhaps have made a difference at first — before I'd had time to think — but not afterward. Please don't mistake me! I've tried to think everything out clearly. I let you come to-day because I wanted to tell you everything; you've been so good." Her eyes filled uncontrollably for a moment, and she smiled through that veiling haze. "At first, when things hurt very much, it seems as if great wealth might mysteriously in some way make up to one — as if, when there is nothing of the spirit, the material could adequately take its place. But then I realized that if I could n't be glad to begin again and struggle upward with a man, that would mean that I did n't care enough to marry him, anyway. You see, no matter how rich a man was, if I married him I'd be — his *wife*."

"Yes," assented Grant. The clock struck the half-hour. The air in the room, in spite of the blue flicker of the gas logs, seemed to grow very chill. A swift, impersonal sense

Just for Two

of the great fundamental things, birth, death, marriage, which must remain starkly the same through all the overlaying conditions, came weightingly to both before she went on.

"But all this is beside the mark. After all, I'm like other women. I might change if it were not for — Oh, it's very sweet to be loved, to be cherished, as you —" She broke off again, and touched his sleeve in a mute caress; he made a motion as if to clasp her in his arms, and then dropped them by his side.

"I want you to know that your presence has always lightened life for me; I feel taken care of, *loved*, every minute. If I could think of myself alone —" Her fingers worked in and out of each other. "But you see, it's this way: when you've been really married — as *I* was — you can never be just yourself again any more! So much of me belonged to Stanley that I can't help being a part of him — still."

"But great heavens!" cried Grant savagely; he rose and stood looking down at her the way Nelly had looked, with a fierce, unconscious movement of one arm, as if to ward off the hated presence that seemed to stand almost visibly between them with its vigorous,

The Wife

squared shoulders, the dark, audacious eyes, the wilful, boyish lips.

"Do you mean that you'd *ever* take him back again? That if he were free ——"

She winced at his tone. "No, no! I've never even thought of it." Her eyes became suddenly very dark. "What's the use of considering such things? Can we ever really tell beforehand what life is going to mean to us? But this is what I wanted to say to you." She rose also, and stood in front of him, her hands holding down the long chain of coral beads. "Always — through everything! — he has had faith in *me*; he has believed that I stood for the best things. Even when he has been angriest he has respected that *something* in me — he expected me to live up to the ideals that I revered. When I sent him away — for it was I who sent him! — he never respected me more than he did then; he would have despised me if I had continued to live with him when he —— Even now, when he has taken this last step — I know him so well — there are things he can't forget and that he knows I can't." She stopped once more, whelmed with the wave of memory that surged upon her, filled with those wrecked blossoms — little blisses

Just for Two

and caresses; dear anniversaries of the heart that only two can know; high blendings of the soul when they both joyed or suffered; the sacred, blinding tears shed together over a little grave.

She went on quite simply after a moment, unmindful of Grant's silence, which was filled with dumb, impotent scorn at her woman's interpretation of the man he knew. Her white face was raised to him in the dusk through which that one ray of silver light shone upon it from without; she had the rapt, cloistered look in her eyes worn by the thousands of women down through the ages who have immolated themselves for the sake of men—whether foolishly or wisely God alone can tell!

“I can't help feeling — I shall always feel — that he has faith in me, that he counts on my being something that he has let go of, that the more he fails the truer I must be. If he can never come back to me in the body I know that there are times when he comes back to me in spirit — when he *has* to come! I know that weak and faulty and inadequate as I am, I stand to him for something that means purity and goodness and the higher life — I'm the one link he has with that; no

The Wife

matter what he does, no matter what he says about me, it's true. There are certain things he could n't believe I'd do — like marrying — that may be quite right and usual in anyone else. And if I take *that* away — if I take away that faith from him" — her voice sank; from somewhere down in the street the trumpet from a marching band flared across the whisper — "I'd be taking something from him that I could never put back again — that no one could. I want to find him — some day — with my child!"

"How — you — *love* — him!" said Grant, slowly, as if the words were wrenched from his lips.

A tremble seemed to pass over her — it was like the rippling of light among the slender leaves of a tree. For a moment Esther stood there transfigured, her beautiful head thrown back, with that light in her eyes and on her soft, breathless lips; her flesh itself seemed translucent in that glory. Then with a swift, appalled gesture she turned and dropped her arms on the corner of the low mantelpiece, with her face hidden in them — remaining there, a dumb and shrouded figure, as Grant, taking up his hat, went softly from the room.

Miss Dream

Miss Dream

AUGUST 4th. I wonder who I am! My glass shows me a small, pale face, blue eyes with a scared expression, curly brown hair, and eyebrows and eyelashes that are much darker. My upper lip is very short, and when I smile one corner of my mouth goes up a little more than the other, to meet a dimple. Sometimes when I smile and happen to catch sight of myself, I seem to be reminded oddly of someone else — but whom? Everyone is trying to help me find out my identity — my name, my family, where I came from. Mrs. Carter suggested that I should write down everything I do remember, and different things that may happen from now on; she thought perhaps that on reading my diary over I might find I had written something unconsciously, perhaps, that would give me a clue. That is what everyone is trying to find — a clue. Everyone is so very kind to me — not only in this house, but in the whole place; but they are all

Just for Two

so bent on finding a clue to my past they watch every movement that I make, and weigh every word I say, so that it makes me very conscious and stiff, not only in my actions, but in my mind some way. I can never forget, even for a moment, that I do not know who I am. When I go through the village I am pointed out to strangers as "the young lady staying at the Carters', who does n't know who she is," and when I stopped yesterday at the bakery to buy little Kay and Amy each a cake, the girl behind the counter asked me:

"Found out anything yet about yourself, Miss Dream?"

It was little Kay who first called me that, because Winstan kept saying about me: "She is in a dream"; and everyone uses the name now, in default of a better. If Mrs. Carter or Olive takes me out to afternoon tea, or to the golf links or the tennis courts, somebody is sure to say after a while: "Would you mind telling your very curious experience, Miss Dream? Mrs. So-and-So has n't heard it." Yet even now, with the little that I think I remember, I don't quite know whether I really *remember*, or that it is what I have been told since. For some time after I came

Miss Dream

here, I think I was still confused. But what everyone knows is that one night this last June, Winstan Carter came home from the one o'clock train from town, walking the mile from the station. The house stands on three terraces, facing the river; there is a great piazza that goes around three sides, hung with vines; on the right, as well as at the front, there are steps up the terraces and the piazza. It was at the top of these that he found me, dressed in white, without a hat, huddled into a heap, asleep, with my head half hidden in the vines. He stopped to question me, and then he went in and woke his mother, and said:

"Mother, there's a young girl asleep outside on the piazza. She seems to have come in late on the excursion boat, and she has got separated from her companions and does n't know where to go. We can't let her stay out there all night; you'll have to take her in and give her a bed somewhere."

Of course Mrs. Carter was perfectly amazed, and filled with horror at the idea of admitting a waif like that into the house at such an hour. She is, however, naturally a kind and unworldly woman, and she could n't reconcile it to her conscience to

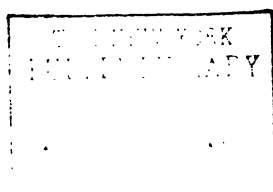
Just for Two

leave a girl so unsheltered — besides, she has never been able to deny either of her sons anything they asked of her. She said she put on her wrapper, and came out in the hall, and she knew when Winstan stood in front of her, looking into her eyes, that she could n't fail his confidence in her. She was ashamed to have any suspicious thoughts. So I was brought in, hatless, one slipper off, like Cinderella, and my hair half dangling down my back, my sleepy eyes winking in the light. How dazzling a light it was! Mrs. Carter seemed part of the light in her white gown, with her white hair, and white skin, her pale eyes, her pale lips. I stood nearer to Winstan, because he was like a kind, dark shadow. They offered me something to eat and drink, which I refused, and asked me a few questions, which I did not answer, my eyelids falling shut, and then Mrs. Carter pushed me up the wide stairs in front of her, and down the long side hall to the little room at the end.

She gave me a nightgown, and watched me take off my coarse frock and underwear, and saw me into bed before she turned out the light and went back to her own room.



"SO I WAS BROUGHT IN HATLESS . . . MY HAIR HALF
DANGLING DOWN MY BACK" ❀



Miss Dream

I remember how delicious those linen sheets felt, and the soft nightgown against my skin; it seems now that I was as happy as a princess in a fairy tale. But Mrs. Carter has confessed to me since that she never passed such a dreadful night in her life; she wanted to lock my door on the outside, but the key was lost. Neither her other son, Kirtland, nor Olive, her daughter-in-law, nor any of the servants knew that I was in the house. Suppose I was a thief, in conjunction with other thieves, and stole all the silver before morning; suppose I strangled the two children, or put poison in the food? She said she could barely keep from laughing outright with relief when I appeared in the big dining room before the servants and the assembled family at breakfast the next morning. I looked so meek, childish, and forlorn — though I think I'm older than I look — and so very frightened myself! Then, of course, they began asking me questions, and I tried very hard to answer, though it was like trying to press my head against a stone wall.

I remembered waking up in a city hospital. I was told there, though I had no recollection of it, that I had been picked up uncon-

Just for Two

scious very early one morning in the street. As I got better people asked me questions that I could n't answer, and they shook their heads; they were all so very busy that there was little time to spend on me. A kind lady who visited the hospital bought me some clothes before I left; when I was picked up in the street I had on only my nightgown, and a big rain-coat; it was thought I must have walked in my sleep. In the next bed to mine there was a girl who was let out the same day I was. She was very good to me, and took me to her room; she would n't let me be teased by anyone; she used to say: "It's not crazy at all she is; she's just livin' in a dream." She sewed for one of the shops, and taught me to sew too—just coarse work. Then one morning she said we were to go on an excursion.

We sailed all day; the boat was very crowded. People danced and sang, but I only sat by the rail and looked at the water. Somehow Kate and I got separated when it got dark, and it frightened me; when the boat stopped on its way at the wharf here, I thought I saw Kate get out ahead of me, and I ran after her. I ran, and I called her; but when I reached her it was n't Kate, and

Miss Dream

when I ran back the boat had gone. So I walked up the street again, and when I saw the side-steps of the piazza and the vines, I thought only that it was a place to rest. As to what happened before I found myself at the hospital I still knew nothing.

I was confused as I was telling all this, and at the end I burst out crying, and said that I was not Maggie, though Kate had called me that — that I had had a name of my own once, I was sure, though nobody could tell me what it was — and I stretched out my arms to them and begged them to believe me, and help me to find my own people.

I can see all their faces now as they looked at me — Mrs. Carter, with the tears in her eyes; Olive, dark-browed and decided, her head held high; Kirtland, lying back in his chair, lazy and smiling — as usual — yet kind, too; and Winstan, gravely pitying. It was Olive who came forward and put her arms protectingly around me. She has a deep contralto voice, as beautiful as she is herself, and she said:

“You poor little dream girl, I believe every word you say.”

Then they all began talking at once, and

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saying that it was plain to be seen that I was educated, and a lady. But as Olive took my hand something in it scratched her, and when she held mine up they saw that there was a ring with a diamond in it, turned inward, on my fourth finger; it had had some worsted wound over it, to hide it — Kate had done that. I had on the ring when I was taken to the hospital, and Kate would n't let me sell it; she said I might find out through that who I was.

Well, this is all of the first part. I have been here ever since. Of course the doctor came to see me, and two more doctors afterward; they say my case is very interesting. And the Carters have tracked me back to Kate and the hospital all right enough — I've seen Kate once — and they've advertised in the papers. They thought at first that it would be only a few days before they found out who I was, yet all this time has passed and no one has come for me. I wonder if no one wants me any more. At first I was dull and composed most of the time, but lately I've begun — not to remember; I can't remember — but somehow to know what is happening to me.

I have been here over two months now,

Miss Dream

and I know that I can't live here always. I try to be useful; I can sew a little, and I go out walking with little Kay and Amy sometimes, and read them stories, and I stay with Mrs. Carter when Olive is busy, because she does n't like to be left alone without anyone to talk to — she likes to talk all the time. Can you imagine it — *all* the time! And she switches backward and forward to suit the person she's talking to. I know she likes me, and believes in me, yet I have heard her consider all sorts of questionable ideas when someone else propounded them, and wonder dubiously as to whether I have been a tight-rope dancer, though I can't walk a plank steadily; or a concert-hall singer, though I can't sing a note. There is one thing that always makes her uncomfortable, and that is when anybody asks if Winstan knew me before he found me on the piazza. She *knows* he did n't — nobody could look Winstan in the face and not know that he was telling the truth, but it always makes her uncomfortable.

August 5th. Oh, I love them all — Mrs. Carter, and dear Olive, and the children,

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and Kirtland, and Winstan — *oh, Winstan!* Winstan, they tell me, was a great athlete; that means when he was in college he won a great many games; he has rows of gold medals on a green covered board in his room, but he won't let his mother ever tell about them to visitors. It's the only thing that makes him angry; he says if he is going to be "shown off" he'll go and live somewhere else. He has an odd, perfectly direct way of doing everything; if somebody told us while we were at dinner that there was a burglar in the room above, Winstan would be going upstairs three steps at a time before the person had finished speaking, choke the burglar into submission, telephone for the police, and be back in his place at the table before we had finished our dessert, and refuse to say anything more about it. He talks very little when you think of it; but he's one of those people who seem to prop you up while they listen. I do not know why it is. Winstan never acts in the least important or conceited; he dislikes to have anyone make a fuss over him; he is always ready apparently to give way to the preferences of others, but if he does say he wants anything everybody just jumps,

Miss Dream

they are so glad to have the chance to wait on him.

If he were as spoiled as Kirtland I think everyone would be perfectly delighted; but no one takes any particular notice of Kirtland at all. Kirtland is very good looking — better looking, perhaps, than Winstan; he is taller, and fairer; he is always laughing and teasing people.

August 6th. At first I only knew the thing I was doing, if you can understand that. Then everybody began to tell me things, and bring me geographies, and histories, and show me pictures; and then I seemed, not to *remember*—I am never conscious of remembering — but to learn it all at once, without effort, though I make queer mistakes. With one part of my brain I seem to be all right, but the other part does n't work; if I try to think at all it's like having my head smash up against that stone wall. I did n't realize it at first, but I know now that it's wonderful that everyone believes in me. Even the servants are so kind and respectful. I heard Olive say laughingly one day to a stranger, "Oh, you can talk that way about Dream until you see her, but

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when you do you 'll be just as crazy about her as everyone else is." That was sweet of Olive, was n't it ?

I did not say before that they have tried me with all sorts of names, male and female — and cities, and countries, and languages. Nothing brings me any remembrance, but I am tired to death afterward, and feel so miserable that I have disappointed them. I try and try to recollect. Sometimes I am quite sure that I see myself sitting by a hearth, and my father and my mother are there, and we laugh and talk together.

August 7th. Are there people longing for me somewhere — eating their hearts out for me ? Sometimes their longing comes over me like a wave and meets my longing for them, and it is almost more than I can bear. I want to call out over and over again: "I don't know how to get back to you — I don't know how!" For whom do I wear this ring ? But that makes me tremble; it frightens me. Perhaps I am not my own — perhaps I belong to someone else. I said I could remember nothing, but some things I *know* that I can't explain. There are only two flights of stairs in this house, but sometimes,

Miss Dream

when it is night and the wind blows — is it because I forget or remember? — when I get to the top of the second flight I have a terrible feeling that I must keep on up another — and another — and another. Once I hit my head against the wall before I knew it, trying to go up farther.

August 8th. The doctors all say now that it is better for me not to try to remember, that the bruised powers of my brain must have no further strain put on them, that if they are left unheeded they will themselves gradually find their strength. I know that even now I often let my mind find things for me when I've lost them; if I've mislaid a book, or a key, if I stop trying to think, and just stand still and let my mind go back naturally to what I have been doing since the time that I know I had the article, in a few minutes the traces of what happened after that begin to come back, too. But yet — ah, yet! — no matter how I stand still and think, I cannot get back to what happened before I know that I was in the hospital.

August 9th. I think there never could have been a pleasanter family than this —

Just for Two

I say it, who know nothing of any other families! They are very united, yet as I get to know them better I see that the household rope is not so evenly twisted as it seems — some strands pull and some sag. Nobody really lives the other person's life; they each intensely live their own. Mrs. Carter loves them all, but she is always fussing a little for fear she does n't please Olive. She will give up her own comfort any time for Olive, yet there are certain small customs on which she takes a frantically obstinate stand. All the curtains in the house are taken down on the first of May, and all the down quilts taken off the beds and put away no matter what the weather. Olive says she knows it really hurts Mrs. Carter's feelings so much if they are kept out; that Olive, who is a chilly person, pretends to put hers away, and actually sneaks it out of the closet every night. Olive is very good to her; Olive's position is perhaps better than that of most daughters-in-law — she has money. I can't imagine anyone to whom it does less good, in a way — she has handsome clothes, but she seldom wears them; she goes around in a shirtwaist and skirt all day, and wears an old brown China silk every night at

Miss Dream

dinner. She is perfectly wrapped up in her children, and works so hard over them that she seldom has time for anything else; she has nurses and maids, but whatever they do she does too. Kirtland is very fond of her, but I think it is stupid for him sometimes here — she is perfectly lovely about her money, she always acts as if it were his even more than hers; but I should think sometimes he'd like her to dress a little more becomingly, and go out with him to places when she can. She has been as generous as possible to me; she has insisted on sending for clothes for me — lovely things — oh, a great deal more than I need. I know Kirtland likes to see them on me, and so does Winstan. I must n't talk of him so much. When I'm not thinking of clues I'm thinking of Winstan; I can't describe it — I suppose it's because he found me — but I have such a feeling toward him. Every night when he comes home and his eyes fall on me — I wait all day for that moment. I'm always afraid beforehand. I think, "Will he be glad to see me to-night? Will he begin to think to himself, 'Is that girl here yet?'" But so far he is always glad, and it makes me feel just as if I had a present.

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But I must n't think so much of him; I must think of clues—that is why I was writing about the down quilts. The other night I was cold, and Olive told me where to get one—we laughed so hard, because we had to be so secret about it, for Mrs. Carter would walk up and down the hall—and at last I pulled one out with little pink and green parrots all over it; and all of a sudden I found myself looking at it and saying, "*Querida mia, Querida mia!*" and I was trembling! It seemed as if that stone wall was dissolving, and I could see a rainbow light on the other side of it; and then the wall was solid and stony once more. Everything went, but the words; I managed to keep them somehow. I told Winstan about it; I have a sacred feeling that I must n't keep anything from him, though it was, some way, very hard to do. He says the words are Spanish, and that they mean "My dearest." We both looked at the ring on my hand, and something chill seemed to come up between us.

August 20th. Yesterday all the servants went on a picnic; the Carters have had their servants for years—there seems to

Miss Dream

be such a nice understanding between them. The rest of us made it a sort of picnic doing the work. Olive and Kirtland cleared the table, and Winstan and I washed the dishes—that is, I was to wash them and he to dry them, but he would put his hands in the dishpan too; his fingers felt so funny and slippery in the soapsuds. He was quite different from usual, as absurd as a boy. One thing is certain: I have washed dishes before! I found myself using a neat little method about everything. I think we must have lived plainly at my home — my little, sweet home! I can hear myself saying — or I fancy I can — “I will wash the dishes to-night, mother, while you read to father.” I can see them look at me as I stand in the doorway, as if they loved me so much! I have such nice, comforting thoughts when I’m with Winstan.

But after a while Kirtland came into the butler’s pantry, too; he laughed, and said something to Winstan — I did n’t hear what, but I know his teasing way — and Winstan looked black, and shut Kirtland up at once. We finished the dishes very quickly, and Winstan went out of the house.

Just for Two

August 21st. Querida mia, Querida mia — my dearest — I wonder who said those words once! I hate that parrot quilt! I put it back on the closet shelf to-night, and took one out with nice white flowers on it.

August 23d. I sat with Mrs. Carter all last evening, and she talked. Olive was upstairs with the children, and Kirtland went over to the Kennedys' — he goes there a great deal — and Winstan was making a call on a girl who has just come back from abroad; they all know her very well; her name is Mary Fordyce. *I am only Dream!* But of course I have a real name somewhere, quite as good as hers.

Well, Mrs. Carter talked of Mary Fordyce, her beauty, her wealth — she is richer, it appears, even than Olive; why does Mrs. Carter care so much about money? She is well enough off herself.

"Mary Fordyce has had more men propose to her than any girl I know, Dream. Winstan and she have always been the greatest friends; I think it's so lovely when a young man and a girl can really be friends." We left no part of her toilet or her person undiscussed. "I'm sure she

Miss Dream

will be glad to get back here, Dream, to a good manicure. Madame Zugia is such an excellent manicure. When you are travelling it is so hard to get a reliable manicure! Mary Fordyce has the most beautiful hands; Madame Zugia told me the other day she had never seen anyone with such beautiful finger-tips and nails as Mary Fordyce — they have such a look of race. So have her ears — she has a mole under the left one. Somebody told me once that a mole under the left ear indicated — I've forgotten at the moment just what it indicated, but something very nice indeed. But when she comes here, Dream, you must notice her hands particularly — her feet are beautifully shaped, too, but her hands ——”

Oh, oh, *oh!* When a person will keep on talking, and never never, stop, like that! Why did they leave me here alone with her?

August 26th. Last night the wind blew — oh, how it blew! It souged in the trees, it rose and fell — a September gale, they said afterward. It rocked the house. Olive — Olive is so good to me, she acts sometimes just as if I were one of the children — came in my room after I was in bed, as the wind

Just for Two

was rising, and asked if I did n't want to have one of the maids bring a cot in the room and stay with me, but I was ashamed to be so silly, and make so much trouble, so I said I did n't mind at all being alone. But I did n't know what was coming. The wind rose higher and higher — it tore at me; I felt that I was going to be swept away bodily with it into the blackness. I turned on all the electric lights, but it was just as black outside. I held on to the brass post of the bed — I was cold with horror. I felt as if I was shrieking, yet I knew that I did not make a sound. Then all the electric lights went out, and I was left clinging to the darkness. It seemed as if I must run out into the hall and up and up those stairs; up and up, and out into that raving storm.

At last I got up shivering, and clung to everything I could, because I could hardly walk, and I felt for a ball of thick twine that I knew was on my dressing table, and I crept out into the hall; the wind was blowing so hard that everything in the house rattled — no one could hear me. I crept down the hall until I found the balusters; I counted until the fourth on the landing,

Miss Dream

and tied my twine to that. The fourth baluster is just in front of Winstan's door. I kept the ball in my hands and went back into my room, and I put on my thick gown and sat in a big chair with the white-flowered quilt over me; I twisted the cord tight around my wrist, and held on to it while the wind blew. It was twisted tight around my wrists, and one end was tied to the baluster by Winstan's door; and while that stood fast I knew that I was safe, nothing could draw me out of the house!

By and by the storm lulled. I slept a little, very lightly, and then the dawn began to come blessedly in at the windows. It was a beautiful, calm morning; and when I crept out to untie the cord around the baluster, I felt so ashamed and foolish, and my fingers fumbled so, I had to get the scissors and cut the twine, instead of untying it. I heard Olive say the next day, when she saw the string dangling: "That must have been one of the children's tricks." I said I told Winstan about everything that seemed "a clue," but I could never tell him about that night. And it was a clue to terror! I don't want to follow it — oh, I want to

Just for Two

wake up out of this dream, and leave all my terrors behind forever!

August 29th. Yesterday I was talking to Olive. I was lying on the couch, in my white kimono, looking out at the blue sky through the green vines, and at the blue river with the boats sliding past on it. I saw Olive going down the hall, and called her in. She had just said good-bye to Kirtland, who was off for the tennis tournament. She looked flushed and tired. She had on an old brown skirt and a faded dressing sacque, and her hair — she has lots of it — was strained tightly back from her face. I believe she had been washing the children's flannels, so as to be sure they would n't shrink! She had a big bottle and a sponge and a bath towel in her hand; she said she was going to show one of the nurses how to shampoo Kay's head. I took the bottle from her, and made her take off her thick things, and let her hair down in a braid, and put on a kimono herself and sit down by me. She looked so pretty; she has a lovely neck and arms. I said:

"Olive, why do you wear such old things? Why don't you dress yourself up more?"

Miss Dream

And she only laughed, and said: "Oh, you don't have to fuss and prink after you're married, Dream; it bores me frightfully to think about clothes for myself, now I have the children to see to. Kirtland likes me, no matter how I'm dressed; besides, he never notices what anyone has on, anyway."

Oh, *does n't* he! I looked at her in wonder. Perhaps it is true that if you love a person *very* much you don't think how you look to them at all — then I'm afraid I'll never love anyone as much as that. Oh, Olive is so good; she ought to have the best there is!

I wanted to say something about Kirtland, but, somehow, I could n't; and she went on:

"I adore to get things for the children — and for you, Dream; and that reminds me that I want you to have one of those embroidered linens such as Mary Fordyce had on the other day; she brought it from Paris."

Olive is so kind, so generous! The feeling of her goodness choked me for a minute, and then I said: "Olive, you must n't; I have no claim on you, I don't belong here — I don't belong anywhere!"

And she put her beautiful, kind arm around

Just for Two

me — Mrs. Carter, though she has two grown-up sons, is just a *person*; but Olive, young as she is, is a *mother* — she held me close to her, and said: “You are just my little sister in trouble. Never say you don’t belong!”

Little sister! I felt somehow so extraordinarily comfortable, so extraordinarily light on my feet, so *natural!* And after a moment I slipped from her embrace and walked over to the chiffonier, opened the drawer and stood looking down into it. Olive asked: “What are you looking for, Dream?” I answered: “The sandalwood box.” *The sandalwood box!* There was no box there.

For the moment everything seemed plain; it was as if some scene would shiver out from the blankness into four walls, and take shape around me. And after all, there was nothing.

August 30th. There are times when I like myself in the glass — when I have on my white muslin, trimmed with lace, and a blue fillet in my curly locks. My cheeks are not so pale now as they were. A dimple is nicer than a mole — I have not yet seen Mary Fordyce.

Miss Dream

August 31st. Oh, I want my own people, my own people! I am so tired of being just a Dream—I want my own people, who would know how to call me by my own name—I want to wake up, and find nothing any more to tear at my heart. I want to go to my own place among my own people. I wonder what it is that keeps me from my father and mother—at what ends of the earth they may be!

Mrs. Fraser and her two daughters were here this morning. They kept half teasing and scolding each other, but with so much love below it, plain to be seen; it was pretty and dear. It made me very lonesome. They talked a great deal of Mary Fordyce; everyone seems to like her so much. One can't judge by the way Mrs. Carter talks. She is evidently a very nice girl.

Oh, *I want my own people!*

September 1st. Kind as the others are sometimes, I know, if for a moment only, they look at me and wonder, What is she? Is it really all true? Sometimes they look at me, too, as if they were weighing me. Only Winstan never does. Always when his eyes meet mine he has the same confident

Just for Two

and encouraging gaze; he smiles in a dear way he has, as if it always pleased him to see me. If that should ever change — ah, then I would fly from this house, even if it were to my death!

September 2d. I am sick of being shown to people!

That girl came here at last, to Sunday dinner; in a pale pink frock with an odd little French guimpe of black and white lace. She knows them all very well — oh, *very* well! Little Kay ran from me to climb in her lap; he calls her Auntie May. After dinner she sat on the arm of Winstan's chair and teased him; they both laughed a great deal. I don't think much of her wonderful hands, but she has a pretty foot; it swung in full view, in a white-clocked stocking and a little black slipper. She and Winstan laughed a great deal. She re-tied his necktie for him — her fine hands touching his chin; she told him not to bite them. *I* would have liked to bite them! Afterward she went through his pockets — I never saw a girl paw over a man as she did. He only laughed at her; everybody laughed, even Mrs. Carter, but it made me so sick

Miss Dream

I actually trembled with disgust. Kirtland tried to take my hand as I passed him when I went out of the room, as if to say, "Don't mind all that, Dream! I like you better than her, anyway," but I had a pin in my hand and stuck him with it — but not very hard; it was a relief to stick somebody! He only laughed; Kirtland is really kind.

September 3d. I did not come downstairs this morning until after Winstan left. He has gone away for a week. I fancied that he waited for me to come down to say good-bye to him; but I could n't. Last night the wind blew again. A branch of a tree was broken, and all night it swished and knocked against my window-pane, but the storm outside was not so bad as the storm in my heart. I am tired, and I am alone. Always I come back to that! No one can be so alone as I, for I have not even a past to belong to!

September 8th. I do sometimes feel sorry for Kirtland, though I don't always like him very much. I'm sure Olive loves him, but he never seems to be of any importance at all beside the children; she sel-

Just for Two

dom has any time for him, and when she has her mind is still with Kay and Amy, so that often he has to speak to her two or three times before she answers. He took a holiday and stayed home this last week, because Olive did n't want to go away with the children, and she would n't go without them — and he hates to go off by himself. He lounged around one entire day waiting for her to go out motoring with him, and at last he took me instead. And the next day she herself suggested that I go out sailing with him — we took little Kay with us — and the next afternoon — it was raining — he read aloud to me the book he'd bought to read aloud to her; and we tramped down to the post-office together, later; and on Friday he took me out motoring and we sat on the Club piazza, and had tea, instead of going straight home. And then — I thought it perhaps was better for him to be with me, instead of that Mrs. Kennedy; I have seen people looking at them, both, sometimes — but I don't know, after all, that it *was* better. Oh, Kirtland *is* nice, really, but after all he should n't — even though it meant nothing whatever. He loves Olive; he'd rather have her with him than any-

Miss Dream

body, I know that, but other people do not. I hate to have him do silly things that lower him, before people, even a little bit.

Sometimes he seems to be getting a look — a look that haunts me, because I've seen it on somebody's face before, though I don't know whose! — the look of a person who is not quite *true*.

Well, in the evening, Olive and I were talking together. She was sitting up in the nursery in the dark, watching near the children, while the maids were downstairs; and Kirtland had gone to the Club. I don't know how we got to talking of husbands and wives — speaking of a Mrs. Fancher, whom everyone talks about — and saying how easily scandal began and how careful people had to be. Oh, we were talking very seriously, and she spoke of Kirtland, and how perfect her confidence was in him; that she felt that a wife was responsible for a great deal; and I agreed with her, and said I thought it would be better for him if she went out with him more; he was so restless that I knew he was only so much with Mrs. Kennedy, or even me, because *she* was n't there. Then she sat straight up in the dark — I could see her in the shadows —

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and asked me in a quick voice why I said that. And I tried to show how little I really meant—I tried to get out of it—and laughed; oh, dear, oh, *dear!* Her mind seemed focussed on Kirtland like a gimlet; I did n't exist, except as a means of getting at him. She brushed all my apologetic words aside—I could hardly get away to my own room, after a long while. The light was n't out in her room when he came home—though she usually goes to sleep early; I could hear the low murmur of voices all night, whenever I woke up. Olive said to me the next day, with stony eyes: "You need give no more thought to Kirtland's affairs, Dream; we have had an explanation." So that 'is what is called "an explanation"—I hope I will never have one, then!

I had been so interested in other things for the last few days that somehow I had forgotten all about clues. There was a great clatter of wagons outside in the street this morning, and all of a sudden I heard someone calling me—calling my name; I knew it was my name, although I could n't quite catch it. I ran out into the hall, but there was no one there.

Miss Dream

September 10th. I must go away from here; I cannot stay. Olive and Kirtland went out to a dance together this evening, she in her low-necked, black lace dress, with a red rose in her hair; she looked very handsome, and he very happy and admiring and gay; I'm so glad! though it made me feel somehow very lonely. I sat with Mrs. Carter all the evening; for a wonder she did not talk — she read a book. Winstan came in, and we all sat there reading; that is, I don't think any of us really read much! Twice my eyes and Winstan's met, and he smiled a little, as usual; but he looked grave again, immediately. I must go away from here, I cannot stay; *I* belong to no one in this house. But perhaps I belong to someone that I don't want to belong to, someone that I have forgotten; he shall not find me — no, *no!*

September 12th. Last night Winstan and I took a walk together. It was the first time since the night he found me that we have been really alone. We have often talked apart from the others for a little while, on the piazza or in the drawing room or library, but we have never gone off alone

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before. It made me feel quite proud some way, when he came up before everybody — there were visitors on the piazza — and asked me to go with him.

I think both Olive and Mrs. Carter were really nervous for fear I might keep Winstan waiting when I ran upstairs to get my lace scarf to throw over my bare throat. Mrs. Carter said: "My dear, you ought to have a worsted shawl," and Kirtland pretended to try to catch one end of the scarf and pull it off, but I only laughed and waved my hand to him as I ran down the steps to Winstan — and his eyes were pleased as I came. He looked very nice in his gray suit, without any hat, as we set off.

I wonder what there is in walking along beside a person, like that, and trying to keep step, that makes it seem so intimate? We walked along the bank by the river, just talking about whatever came up, and laughing at little things. Then we went down on the disused wharf and sat far out in the water, on the thick square log at the end. There was no moon; the coloured lights of the steamboats, and the launches, and the sailing craft went twinkling past, with a cool

Miss Dream

splashing of water; the wind blew gently in our faces. At first we still talked of very usual things; but at last, when we had been quiet for a few minutes, Winstan said, in that perfectly direct way of his:

"Dream, I want you to know that I love you better than anyone else in the world."

Oh! I can hear him saying it now. He went on to tell me that he felt that he had no right to take advantage of my position and speak before I had found out about myself — there might be barriers that could n't be disregarded; that he loved me too much not to take into consideration for the future everything that ought to be considered, and he knew he had no right to ask me to marry him yet, or perhaps even to tell me what he was telling me now — oh, I was glad and proud that he spoke like that! But he wanted me to know beyond question that he loved me, and had from the first, though he must not ask me whether I cared for him, and everything should go on exactly the same as if he had n't spoken.

And I said yes, that would be best, and the next thing I knew my arms were around his neck, and I was crying with my head

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on his heart. When I could speak at last all I could say was: "I don't want any other girl to *touch* you!"

It was a long time before we went back to the house, with the sweet smell of the wet clover coming up through the darkness. I am sure, oh, very sure, no lover has ever kissed me before—whatever is hidden in the past, it is not that! Oh, I don't want to remember anything now! I don't *want* to wake up; I don't want to be anything but Winstan's Dream!

September 15th. I am here in the darkened room. They think I am asleep. I cannot sleep—oh, I have waked at last, and I can never sleep again!

It was the day after Winstan and I had walked to the river. Mary Fordyce had come to announce her engagement; she had got engaged on the steamer sailing home, and her fiancé had just come out from town, and was to stop at the house for her and be introduced to the family.

I came downstairs just after she had been telling them; while I was speaking to her, there was a light, sliding step outside on the piazza, and Mary blushed and said: "There

Miss Dream

he comes!" and I stopped to listen, and said suddenly:

"Why, it's José!"

They looked at me so astonished; and the next moment I saw his face, handsome and dark, yet ghastly when he looked at me, and I cried:

"Where is my sister?"

It was as if everything crashed around me. I fell on the floor in a dead faint; but when I woke up — I knew! Oh, my heart, my heart, I *knew!*

There are no father and mother to grieve or be glad for me; long, long ago they died, when Alice and I were little children — we never knew them, we never had a home. We were Alice and Anita Farnham, and we lived in California. Our only relative was an uncle; his wife was always afraid we would be a trouble to her, so we were kept in a convent boarding school until we grew up. Alice was older than I; she used to make me mind her, but she sang me to sleep at night. We did everything together — fought and scolded and loved each other, the way sisters do! After we left the convent we taught in a school; that was when we met José. He was engaged to Alice, but she broke the

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engagement — she never told me why; they still cared for each other, and he would not let her give back his ring — he was wild over her. I liked him, yet I never trusted him. She kept the ring in a little sandalwood box, but she would not wear it.

When my uncle died we sold all the little property we had, and came East with the money, quite suddenly, to go abroad. I almost quarrelled with Alice because she insisted on bringing the parrot José had given her, the one he had taught to say "*Querida mia!*" — and José followed us on the long journey on the train, and came to the hotel where we were stopping over night when in the city. There was a Mrs. Boynton, whom we knew, with us there; she was going to England, too. I sat in the next room that evening, while my sister and José talked together, and they talked so long that I got tired, and undressed, because the night was so hot. I could hear him pleading with her — Alice was so beautiful! — and at last he got her to say that she would forgive him, though I did n't know for what, and would be his wife. He seemed so happy my heart relented toward him. There were people running to and fro in the hall, and

Miss Dream

a noise outside, but I did not notice it. The parrot, in his cage of silver wire, swung to and fro, screaming out incessantly, "*Querida mia, Querida mia!*" And then Alice came in, for a moment, and kissed me, and said: "Little sister!" And I asked: "Did you want anything, Alice?" And she said: "Only the sandalwood box — my ring is in it — but I have forgotten where I put it. Will you find it for me? José wants to place the ring on my finger again." After she went out I found the box in her travelling bag; I took the ring out and put it on my own finger, looking at it. I thought, "When that is once more on Alice's hand she will be mine no longer."

Then there was suddenly a terrible noise like a great wind, and Mrs. Boynton rushed in. She caught up my raincoat and said, "Put it on over your nightgown — run — the hotel is on fire!" And I screamed, "Alice!" And she said, "José is with her — run, run!" And we tried to run through the hall and downstairs, and it was all smoke and flame and roaring wind; and then we ran up and up and up, and on to a roof; and I slipped across the roofs down somewhere below, and clung to things, and reached

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a fire escape and went down into a side place. There was a great crowd near, and I ran into it; and there in a window, with the flames behind, were Alice and José; there were ladders just reaching to it. Suddenly it was José who had pushed in front of Alice and was on the ladder — and he was coming down — and then the flames roared up into the window — and the roof fell in with a great crash. And I ran and ran and ran. It was the next night that they found me unconscious in the street. I do not know where I had been; there was nothing to connect me with the fire; I was supposed to have perished with my sister in the ruins of the hotel. I am Anita Farnham. But oh, my sister, my sister — my sister! How can I live, and remember how she died? Oh, if I had never waked — my *sister*! Alice, this is your little Anita, your little sister! O Lord, let me die for her now; let *her* live, let me suffer instead of her, so that she may be glad once more. She suffers, she suffers, she suffers — ah —

September 18th. My room is all full of white flowers, white roses, soft white flowers

Miss Dream

everywhere; they are cool and soft when I place my cheek on them, or hold them in my arms. Where my sister is it is as soft, as white, as cool as they are; she has no pain, Winstan says so. Only I have the pain; oh, how glad I am that it is only I who have the pain! When it gets too great I fill my arms with the cool white lilies, the cool white roses — I plunge my face in them. Where she is, my darling, darling sister, it is cool and white and peaceful — like this — and this. My sister — my sister! It is only I who have the pain — *it is only I who have the scorching pain!* Oh, if Winstan were here now to tell it to me! Why, I ought to laugh and be glad because it is only I who have the pain. She is cool and peaceful — it is only I who suffer!

September 19th. Olive is dear, but she cannot stop the pain. She brought me in some more white roses from Kirtland; she says his tears fell on them. Mary Fordyce has sent me flowers, too — *poor* Mary Fordyce! she is ill herself; she has sent José away. I am sorry for her, but when I write *his* name — oh, I want my sister —! I want to *see* that she is safe!

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September 20th. Winstan came and sat by me last night while I lay here on the couch among the flowers. My eyes were burning; he put his hand over them — his hand was so cool! He talked to me about ordinary things; he had bought a birthday present for his mother, and a bat and ball for little Kay; and after a while he said, "We are to be married day after to-morrow, Dream, and sail for Italy in the afternoon. I want to take you out of all this as soon as possible. You are willing, Dream?" And I said, "Then you can be with me every *minute?*" And he held me very close as he said gently, "Yes, every minute, my little Dream."

His hand was so cool; he says the waves are very cool, too — I shall hear them lapping against the side of the vessel. And I shall be with him — he will tell me how peaceful and happy she is!

September 21st. This is my wedding day. Alice came to me last night, while I slept. She was all in white; her hands were cool. There is no one like your sister, who remembers all the little things that you remember, and scolds you for crying. We

Miss Dream

laughed and talked for a long time together;
I do not know now what we talked about.
I only know that I woke happy, for I felt
that she was happy.

Oh, Winstan, she was so glad that I am
your Dream! She says that some day I
will only remember all the happy things;
some day I will forget even to tremble when
the wind blows!

A Clear Field

HERE are your glasses now, Mr. Johnson. It was quick work to make a new pair at such short notice; it's fortunate you were in town when the others broke."

The optician's assistant, young and narrow-faced, with very black "pompadour" hair, and eyeglasses that shone like jewels, leaned over the showcase toward a square-set, bronzed, athletic-looking young man in tweeds with a bag of golf clubs beside him, who had been watching the clock that hung between the dark-cased barometers on the wall.

"Let me adjust these on you. Take care, sir! There go the pair you had on."

"It's of no consequence," said the gentleman addressed as Mr. Johnson, stooping over to pick up the two broken bits of crystal as he spoke. "They were an old pair that were never any good. I was suffering with them all last evening."

"Ah!" said the optician's assistant. He gazed enigmatically at his customer with

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an effect of something unpleasant withheld from speech. "You're very near-sighted, are n't you? I suppose you know that you take an unusually strong lens. Have a good deal of trouble with your eyes, don't you?"

"None at all," said Mr. Johnson shortly, all the more shortly that it was n't true. He had been having trouble lately, although he had laid it to the same old score of his health. When he overworked, as he had been doing all summer until this last week, he always felt the strain first in his eyes; a merely functional disturbance, that disappeared gradually as he got rested.

It always annoyed him intensely when unfamiliar opticians exclaimed at his peculiarity of vision, as if it were an interestingly novel fact. Did they only have people with perfect eyesight come to them? he wondered. The old man, not present to-day, who was the father of this gleaming assistant, and in whose guttural utterances one put an unquestioning faith, had once said to Philip:

"Your eyes are all right. You come to me always and I keep them right," and in that dictum Philip had rested.

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But as he strove now to hurry on his way to the station the disquieting tones seemed distinct. The streets lay in a dazzling blaze of sunshine, and were crowded impedingly not only with a moving throng of men and women and large-hatted girls, but also with stationary groups of men, talking and gesticulating in the middle of the pavement — the populace going and coming at noontime from offices and department stores, people who must eternally eat at restaurants in the middle of the day. It was sometimes hard to thread one's way competently even with the help of the new glasses.

Philip had foolishly gone to a show the night before in which calcium lights had borne a lurid part, and a headache and intermittent blur of vision were still affecting him. It was a great relief to get at last out out of the August glare into the semi-darkness of the station and the waiting train, after first assisting a tall and beautiful young woman up the steps of it. Her slight, accustomed acknowledgment of a courtesy ended his anticipation there; the poise of her charming figure as she preceded him down the dusk of the aisle contained, as he distinctly felt, no invitation to him to follow

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her companionably, although they had been fellow-occupants of the same hostelry for a week, and were both bound for it now. Philip was used to both open and tentative advances from women on slight acquaintance; so used, indeed, that he took this evidence of popularity without conceit, and, indeed, without much thought of any kind, as customary with anyone; it was simply pleasant or boring, as occasion served. He would have been ashamed to think that he had an unusually pleasing personality, added to which was that masculine charm which consists in keeping under a frank and open manner a reserve that is at once divined, and that piques feminine curiosity. He had been in love, more or less, several times without abrogating this latter quality—he had never been his inner self with any woman, as he was with his friends who were men.

He did not feel like talking now, yet Miss Hallowell's continued tacit refusal of his company nettled him unwarrantably. He had not owned to himself how much he had counted on the chances of this little journey to-day—he had heard the day before that she was to take a trip to town this morning.

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He had, however, a truly masculine enthusiasm for beauty, as a Best Good in itself, and it was a satisfaction to establish himself a couple of seats behind her on the other side of the aisle, where, in the intervals of blinding headache increased by the motion of the train, he could let his eyes dwell, whether she would or no, on the exquisite slope of her shoulder, the curve of her long throat, the melting shadow on her cheek, and the rich, plentiful upward sweep of her thick, glinting brown hair.

The sight was in itself both alluring and delicately restful. Miss Hallowell was a person who gave even to the casual observer an extraordinary impression of harmony in her outer and inner attributes. The large and candid lines of her lovely figure, which seemed to mould any garment to them, were completed by the character of her wide brow and rounded cheek; the clear glance of her blue eye carried with it the assurance of a lovely and candid soul.

A radiant and soft freshness seemed to emanate from her — yet with all this gentleness and softness and radiance, that made her so friendly easy of access by others, Philip had not for seven days been able to

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approach one jot nearer, figuratively speaking, than he was now, though they were living in the same house and eating from the same table.

There were times when he felt an almost brutal desire to force her attention toward him, especially when that sickly black-bearded fellow Dunning, whose appearance he detested, had been palpably battenning on her society. Her attitude toward Philip interposed a glacial barrier so slight as to be unnoticed by others, yet which he, as a gentleman, could n't try to pass; he even acquiesced, with half-amused, wholly impatient reminiscence, in the justice of the attitude, in which there was no tinge of pleasing coquetry — he was simply a man whom she did n't care to know.

Eight or nine years ago, when Miss Constant Hollowell was a large, pale, immature girl of eighteen in a white frock and blue ribbons, she and Philip had met at a dance, and after four or five waltzes together had spent the rest of the evening on a little balcony of the casino, where the moonlight had given to her white gown and her youthful fairness an angelically spiritual suggestion. Did I say that Philip had never shown his

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inner self to any woman? For that hour he had shown it — the two had talked as two souls do talk sometimes in very strange places, without regard to either sex or age. They had talked of life as they each wanted to live it; of death as they must think of it if they wished to live at all. It was one of those hours that cannot be compelled, and which leave a wonder behind them.

When they parted he had eagerly asked for permission to call at her home in the suburb of a neighbouring city. A couple of months later, after some formal correspondence as to the date, he had tramped a muddy, unlighted mile from the railway station to make one of a family circle in the Hallowell drawing room where Constant, large and thick-looking, in a gown of woollen plaid, sat embarrassingly dumb, while he was being entertained by her stout, amiably questioning mother, and her aunt, a youngish, modish woman, indescribably frost-bitten, beside whom the grandmother, also present, seemed almost peachily blooming. . . . Philip carried away an impression of that awful call never to be effaced. Some little while later Constant wrote him a note inviting him to dinner on a certain Friday, and, with the

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guilelessness of inexperience, offering him the choice of any other day thereafter if he could n't come on the one she suggested. Philip waited to answer that letter — waited longer still. He never answered it.

It was one of those dreadful omissions of which most of us are guilty at some time, and for which there is never any excuse to offer. A year later, at a wedding reception, he saw Constant from afar, and, with the fatal cowardice of his shame, successfully evaded her, with the tingling conviction, afterward, that she had known it. Since then he had not seen her until a week ago when she had come to The Nook for rest after a strenuous year of journalistic work. There was no longer any family circle.

"Hello, Johnson!"

The voice of the man behind him made him start as the train whizzed from under the semi-darkness of an overhanging bridge.

"Oh, is that you, Stevens?"

"Yes, I had n't the least idea that you were in front of me until you turned," said Mr. Stevens, with what seemed reproach in his tones. He was a slim, light, very correctly dressed young man, whose chief characteristic was earnestness. "I telephoned over

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to The Nook last night from our bungalow, but you were n't there. I was just going to ask Miss Hallowell to take a note to you. By George, I said I'd send her a five-pound box of chocolates, and I forgot clean about it, but she is n't the kind that would lay it up against one. She spent two hours the other night helping me to take a splinter out of Bounder's paw — she'd do anything for an animal. See here, Johnson, I want to know if you won't take my place as 'barker' at the show to-night — the carnival, you know." The carnival was a combination of circus and show, whose performances were hired to swell the funds of charity, aided thereto by the amateur efforts of good society; a "barker" stood in front of each tent and called out its attractions to the passers-by. "I've got to go on to Boston now."

"Why, I thought you were head and front of the whole thing," exclaimed Philip in surprise.

Stevens was, he knew, noted for his ardour in getting people to undertake schemes, and then sliding from under himself. He answered now: "Yes, I know, but I've got to go to Boston. I hope you won't fail me, Johnson; it's so discouraging when

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people fail us, and it's really very important to have the carnival a success. The county hospital needs the money. We must have enough barkers; we can't be one tent short."

"I refused in the first instance, you know," argued Philip. "I'd like to oblige you, but, honestly, Stevens, I don't see how I can." He gave way to what he felt was a futile frankness. "I've got to qualify this afternoon for the tournament, so I'm obliged to leave a lot of writing for to-night, and I've got a splitting headache now. I don't see how I can bark, really."

"Well, of course, if you feel that way about it," said the plainly unconvinced Stevens. "Try and get Fancher, then, will you? No, by the way, he's gone to Canada. Well, hunt up Cole, then; his telephone number is n't in the book, but you can get it from Central—I tried myself for an hour last night, and had to give it up, after all, or I would n't ask you now. You see, I've promised to get some one in my place, and it puts them in an awful hole to be short one barker."

"Oh, I'll take the job," said Philip resignedly. It would be less trouble than following out the plans of the conscientious Stevens, who was ready to track possible

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coadjutors through space by proxy. "All right, all *right*; don't say any more about it. I'll bark. Hello, I did n't know we were here already." He waved a hand back at Stevens as he jumped up and strode down the aisle in the wake of Miss Hallowell, who, he felt, with a fresh access of irritation, was getting out promptly so that he should n't help her down. Perhaps it was as well that he had n't tried to. As he got off himself his foot went just beyond the step and slipped between the platform and the train, which began to move slowly. It was really only for an instant that he lay sprawled out there, face downward, at the mercy of those grinding cogs and wheels, before some one hauled him upright and out of danger, but it was n't a pleasant instant — it left him amazingly shaken. He heard a voice asking quickly: "Are you hurt? Are you hurt?" and hardly realized, in his disgust at the stupidity of his fall, that those were Miss Hallowell's blue eyes upturned to his in candid anxiety until the interest had faded out of them at his answer, "Not at all," and she was already walking toward the sloping path that led to The Nook. Philip usually footed it to the links, but to-day he was fain to bundle

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himself and his golf clubs into the "station wagon," a mysteriously depressing vehicle which, though drawn by an incredibly slow, weak-kneed white horse, shook and lurched as though at the behest of the highest speed; out all day in the clover-scented sweetness of the open air, it yet reeked clogingly of the stable, and the narrow leather sides were invariably frescoed with dried mud, though drought had claimed the countryside for weeks.

"You're back early," said Mrs. Lumley welcomingly, as Philip, a couple of hours later, stood looking in at the long French window of the living room, which seemed unusually full of people at that hour. A group of card-players that included Miss Hallowell and Mr. Dunning were stationed over by the door, and the intervening space was occupied by embroidering women; two children, stretched at full length on the floor, were offering a satiny green apple to a large red setter with a fringed tail that flapped obviously. Philip, after what seemed a moment's hesitancy, stepped over the sill and took the place on the old mahogany sofa by Mrs. Lumley, to which her gesture had invited him, although she was a person whom

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he usually rather avoided; she was a light-eyed, snub-nosed, graceful woman, undeniably picturesque, but with a manufactured quality in her picturesqueness, a triviality in her charm, which seemed always about to offend some wincing fibre of good taste.

She greeted him now with animation. "Do let me put this pillow back of your head and make you comfy — you look worn out. I stuffed all the pillows behind me so that those dreadful Smiths should n't get them; they take them off to the hammock every afternoon, if you don't look out! A lot of us complained, but it did n't do any good. They won't speak to anybody now but Mrs. Freeling. Do you know, her husband has n't been up here once! We think he's a myth, or else she's getting a divorce. But I'm so desperately interested in the tournament. What was your score this afternoon?"

"I did n't qualify," said Philip shortly, passing his hand over his eyes involuntarily as if to brush away something in front of them.

"You did n't qualify!" Mrs. Lumley gazed at him with real astonishment; even the players at the table glanced up. "Why, I thought you were one of the crack players!"

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"Oh, I'm a very uncertain one — something seems to have gone wrong with my stroke lately."

"You were out too late in town last night," said Mrs. Lumley, with triumphant divination. Her voice dropped to a murmur. "You should n't have deserted us! Never mind, you paid up for it — Miss Bloom recited."

"Ah, indeed," said Philip, with an instinctive twinkle in response to hers. "That consoles me for missing an evening of your society. Deliver me from a girl who recites — it always makes me feel ashamed for her; heaven only knows why!"

"And Miss Hallowell sang for us at last."

"Oh!"

"It appears that Mr. Dunning had had a bad day, and when he could n't sleep he sent down to ask her. We turned out all the lamps and she sang in the moonlight. She says she can only sing for certain people. Of course, she's the retiring kind that will do anything for a *man*. Very handsome girl, is n't she?"

"Do you think so?" asked Philip. His eyes — he could n't help it — said: "I consider you much handsomer."

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Mrs. Lumley blushed a little — unnecessarily, perhaps — to show her appreciation of the gaze. Then she began in the tone which Philip knew fatally well. "I wonder if you would care to join a little party that we are getting up for to-morrow morning — Mr. Mackensie, the Westmores, and my humble self — to walk to the Falls. They say the Falls are so beautiful now."

"Thank you. But I'm afraid I'll not be able to go," said Philip. He was, unless he looked out sharply, always being nailed to small and large engagements for things which he did n't want to do in the least. To take a hot and dusty walk to the Falls in company with a set of uninspiring people whom he had at three meals a day, anyway, was no inducement; he would have walked seven miles in an opposite direction to get away from them. Even Mrs. Lumley began to repel as she clung more confidently. He was so used to detaching himself from people who did n't want to let him go that the process had almost become mechanical. As he rose now Mrs. Lumley's face fell perceptibly, but she made another smiling effort:

"Of course, we'll all be at the carnival

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to-night. What time do you think we ought to start?"

"You had better ask someone who can tell you more about that than I," said Philip agreeably. "*I* only know that I am to bark!" He started, as he spoke, for the door. The room seemed in the dim light to be extraordinarily full of chairs and people, not to speak of that sprawling, moving group on the floor, which, after all, he managed to skirt in safety, although he hit once against a rocker. He could not see the odd, startled expression on the face of one of the players turned his way. As he was passing the table some one rose precipitately, colliding against Philip with immediate apology. Colliding? It was a slight yet definite push with two hands, which deflected him to one side, and in front of what he now perceived was the open doorway. Where, then, had he been steering before — into the blank wall? The thought was menacing and terrible. It did not take away from the strangeness of the incident that his rescuer had been Miss Hallowell; he had felt the indescribable freshness of her presence, her hair had touched his face, her white dress had brushed against him. She must have seen —

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What *had* she seen? He went upstairs whistling with forced lightness, his mind filled with the confusion of the occurrence.

This clinging blankness that he could n't push away from him, that made all outlines blurred and dim — the misstep of the train, the failing game, the misdirection now — something, indefinably perceived, indefinably feared as possible at some far future time, had happened: something had gone wrong with his eyes.

He dropped into a chair by the open window in his room. This condition was but a natural outcome of the haunting symptoms of away back; he had been writing much too late at night, forcing his eyes, as he well knew, even since coming here for rest. Yet he might have gone on for years — he had expected to have gone on for years — without getting any worse. Those murderous calciums of the night before had given the additional stroke. It was monstrous to suppose that his life was coming to an end in this way — he would n't think of such a thing. Yet, what if it were true? Unbelievable things happened! All kinds of stories of blind people came swiftly thronging into his mind — he knew of one man who

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had learned Greek during a year of darkness; his wife had sat on the other side of a thin partition, teaching him orally; another one, well known, perfected wonderful inventions in his isolation. There were not wanting historic instances of people whose triumphant individuality had given solace above all restrictions, but such ideas, interesting before, now seemed to him horrible. He felt a passionate desire for daylight; even the darkening shadows of the evening oppressed him like the foreknowledge of something that was always to be his. He would n't try to go out in the evening any more after to-night. *After to-night!* If he could manage that! If he had not promised Stevens hard and fast he would not have gone. He had a sickening fear of detection, of somebody's finding out that he could n't see, as if their knowledge would clinch it as a fact forever. Kind-hearted people would be offering to lead him, they would show the pitying attention given to the crippled — then they would begin to avoid him. He had done the same by others. . . . After a long while he took off his glasses and bathed his eyes, which ached unbearably — fumbling around helplessly afterward, as

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he always had to without them, with feeling finger-tips, for his toilet accessories. But when he put them on again his heart went up with the rebound. It seemed that his vision was clearer than it had ever been, every leaf on the tree outside his window stood out clear in the pale dusk. He snatched up his Panama and ran downstairs blithely with it in his hand; he had suddenly an overmastering desire to see Constant Hallowell with this new distinctness, and to ask her why she had helped him.

And he saw her — the candid lines of her lovely figure, the richly clustering hair, the charm of her white throat, the charm of her parted lips, as she leaned backward into a radius of lamplight, talking with a group in the hall. For the fraction of a second he knew that her gaze rested on him as he strode down the hall toward her. If he had had any intention of speaking to her the intention fell flat on the instant, though he raged inwardly, confounded. What was there about her that made her so utterly inaccessible? If she had been merely frigid or proud or disdainful — He could disregard opposition, but he could not intrude on the privacy which she reserved for herself.

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Yet her assistance to him had not been accidental!

He ate the evening meal in moody silence; that illuminating vision was fading rapidly away into thick dimness again. Philip had a tense sensation as of one in an interim between something that had happened and something that was going to happen, and little unnecessary annoyances flicked this inner mood. Miss Hallowell was apparently having a very good time at the other end of the long table, which was covered, in the farmhouse fashion that was the habit of The Nook, with a coarse, very clean white cloth, with thick glass vases of sweet peas distributed down the centre of the board. These were flanked on the sides by large white cups and saucers, and small platters of fried fish, caught in a near-by lake. Half of the people were not down yet, Mrs. Lumley among them; on the opposite side a frank lady conversed at length as to the restrictions of her diet. Philip hurried through the meal, and then waited interminably on the side piazza for young Davis Faulkner, who shared his occupation of barker at the carnival; cowering back into his shadowed corner as he waited, to avoid

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a hovering lady, who always asked him to post a letter for her.

"Is Miss Hallowell going to-night?" he asked abruptly, when Faulkner joined him.

Faulkner looked surprised. "Miss Hallowell? Yes, she's coming with Dorothy" — Dorothy was Mr. Faulkner's fiancée — "and the crowd."

"Oh!"

"Yes, Constant's got Dunning in charge, after all; he was going to stay at home, you know, but at the last moment he concluded to go — so that he could keep her from having too good a time, I suppose. We'd better hurry on; we've got good billets: I'm on the Ferris wheel and you've got the merry-go-round, and somebody else will claim them if we don't get there. They say Dunning's got nervous prostration, but, from what Dorothy tells me, I call it ordinary selfishness. I'm not denying that he's clever and a genius and all that — but that only makes it worse. I get so tired of his long face and his hooked beak and that 'Pet me, mother, pet me' expression. Yesterday morning — you were n't here — when everyone else went off on Towner's yacht, Constant stayed home to read to him because

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he felt as if he were going to die. Nobody else will put up with him! He varies between a sneering, blackguarding skepticism as to a hereafter, and the fear that he's predestined to eternal torment; when he's confuted on one ground he takes to the other — he has one of those patent back-acting minds that never can stick to one side."

"Pleasant sort of a companion," said Philip shortly as the two walked on.

"It makes Dorothy furious. She thinks the world and all of Constant! She says what that girl has gone through nobody knows. All her family died off within a year, and Constant did all the supporting before that. She's musical critic for the *Sphere* now. Dunning got her the position; he was a friend of her family; she thinks everything of that. She ought to start in and have a good time now, all the good time she can get, but she has a perfect mania for compassion. She'll marry some bloke — Dunning, I suppose — primarily because he needs to be taken care of, and then she'll be a sacrifice to the end of the chapter."

"Dunning seems to think a good deal of her," said Philip.

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Faulkner stopped for a minute. "Do you *know* Dunning?"

"No."

"Well, a closer man never breathed. It hurts him to give up a cent! It's the one vice in a man I can't *stand*. Dorothy says he's never given Constant so much as a flower or a bar of chocolate in all these years he's known her; when we made up that purse for those flowers for Miss Bloom the night of the play he was the only man who did n't chip in! Great Scott! when I grudge a little pleasure like that to a girl—— Dorothy and I want particularly to do something for Constant. She's always been left out of things; she's so unselfish that people trade on it. I'm awfully sorry we can't take her motoring to-morrow — she got crowded out last time — but there seems to be always someone that we *have* to take."

"I suppose so," said Philip briefly. He began to feel a strange, almost proprietary, resentment in having her discussed at all, and a sort of latent fury that she was dependent on the uncertain good-will of others.

As they walked they had gradually been

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gathering companions, hatless youths and girls in their teens, men with shabby cutaways and black derbies tipped on one side, shawled and jacketed women with children by the hand, swarming in from the factory lines beyond the village, and all veering toward one point. In that open field ahead white tents of all sizes loomed up in the soft darkness, illuminated by circles and rows of little points of light which seemed to cast no radiance around them. The shadowy outlines of the meadows were already filled with people passing and re-passing on the damp, weed-grown, trampled grass, which gave forth an odd, pungent odour. It should by rights have been warm, but the August night was cool, with a suggestion of rain in the thick cloud which hid the rising moon that everyone had been counting on. A brass band made itself suddenly evident, mingled with the mechanical strains of the merry-go-round. The barkers were already at work; young Gray, one of the summer colony, was engaged in yelling out attractions to the entering crowd. He hailed Philip and Faulkner, to the joy of the multitude.

“Walk up, ladies and gentlemen, and

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especially Johnson and Faulkner, and see the beautiful two-faced lady — one face blond and one brunette — greatest attraction ever offered; has received offers of marriage in every town in Europe and America. Beautiful two-faced lady, *also* elegant double-jointed gentleman from Java, ties himself into true-lover's knots while you wait. Lottery tickets presented to all who enter; if you get one with portrait of the two-faced lady or double-jointed gentleman of Java it gives the winner luck in love for twenty-four hours. Only *ten* cents to see the beautiful two-faced lady and the double-jointed gentleman, and receive a ticket which may insure your happiness for life. Come, plunk out, you two! Get inside with you!"

There was a wild shout when, a couple of minutes later, Faulkner and Philip came out of the tent, the former, to Philip's absurd chagrin, with a brilliantly blue pictorial lucky ticket held high. The tent was instantly besieged, as the two barkers hurried away. The place was already beginning to fill up with another strain of society; merry after-dinner parties or girls in white with floating scarfs and white-slippered feet, well escorted and

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chaperoned, mingling oddly with the press and slipping in and out of the shadows into the lighted places, and from the light back in the gloom again.

Troops of children ran to and fro over the slippery grass. There was a general air of surprised hilarity in the commingling of all classes in the purpose of pleasure which charity had made possible. People were continually meeting and exclaiming: "You here, too?" in laughing surprise. The circus was already in full tilt, the barker at the receipt of custom rapidly passing in consignments of small children with guarantee to deliver them to the waiting parents when the show was over.

Philip found that his billet at the merry-go-round had been given, by some confusion of consignment, to a pugnacious young doctor who stood on his rights of possession with an evident conviction that the hospital funds would suffer irretrievably if he did n't, and Philip in exchange was escorted to the only place left — a tiny, detached tent, dimly lighted, on the outer line of the circle at the end where, indeed, it stopped being a circle at all — the snake show, some thirty feet away, being on one side, and only the open

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field on the other. It offered as attraction a Learned Pig. Philip began his patter without enthusiasm:

"Walk up, ladies and gentlemen, and see the Learned Pig, a recent graduate from Yale. Answers questions in four different languages."

Only a few scattered boys came in from time to time to see the Learned Pig and Philip stood there alone. After a while, however, there seemed to be a commotion over in the other part of the ground. He heard the words called from one to another, "There's something the matter with the Ferris wheel; it won't go" — and there was a sweeping rush of the people toward it. Philip, yielding to the infection, left his post and ran also, making one of the jostling crowd. The excitement was, however, soon over — the wheel, which had unaccountably refused to move, was going on again lightsomely. There seemed to be no one in the throng around him that Philip had ever seen before, except — yes, that was Mrs. Lumley, her head thrown back, a crimson cape over one shoulder. He felt a momentary sensation of pleasure, and then of intense repugnance to meeting

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her. He turned and made his way as well as he could quickly out of the throng, but that five minutes looking at rows of lights had done its work — the blur he had been persistently fighting off by sheer will power had settled down as a shrouding fact. He seemed to have lost all his bearings as he got beyond the last row, and then thought that he was approaching his post from the side next the field. He took his stand some dozen paces away and began resolutely:

“Walk up, ladies and gentlemen, and see the Learned Pig, a recent graduate from Yale.”

“Mr. Johnson! Is it you? What are you doing out here?” The amazed voice was that of Miss Hallowell.

Philip was astonished at the sensation it gave him. “Do I care as much as that?” he thought, as he returned with light questioning, “*Am I ‘out here’?*”

“Indeed you are,” she answered. He felt the glance with which she regarded him. “You are near a little tent out in the field with some barrels under it. I’ve been taking some children to the carriage and ran back this way. Take care! Don’t move there; you’ll step into the ditch. Mr.

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Johnson, I'm afraid there's something serious the matter. Can't you see?"

"I'm afraid I can't," said Philip ruefully — "that is, not very distinctly. Everything's gone blurred and queer—it gives me a very odd feeling. I'll be all right in a few minutes, only"—the lightness of his tone sank to a groan—"my eyes have been going lately; I've felt it, though I would n't take the warning. They're going just as fast as they can now."

"But you can do something first!"

"Can you?" He went on as if more to himself than to her. "I'll consult Doctor Warner when he gets back to town, of course—he's the highest authority—but it won't make any difference."

"Oh, you must n't talk like that—you must n't even think it," said Miss Hallowell earnestly. "Depression is the very worst thing for you."

"Oh, I suppose I ought to take it as a joke. Mighty funny thing to be going blind when you are not the person," returned Philip, with a new unreasoning rage, that gave way, at her silence, to quick, proud apology.

"I beg your pardon; it's brutal of me to

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“speak like this; it’s very kind of you to try and help me out.” His voice sank: “I have such a horror of the whole thing; I’d as soon die at once as begin that dark-room business, and I have a horror of anybody else finding out until I have to tell it.”

“Yes, I know,” said Miss Hallowell, pitifully. Her white gown rustled near him as he stood with down-dropped head, his teeth pressed together. Far off in the gloom the circus band was playing with rattling swiftness, *Waltz Me Around Again Willie*.

She went on after a few moments, very gently: “Suppose I take you more into the centre of things — to your friends — don’t you think that would be better?”

“And let the Learned Pig root for itself?” queried Philip, turning toward her with a smile. “Well, so be it!”

“Then grasp my arm just above the elbow, Mr. Johnson, as if you were piloting me. I perfectly detest to see couples walking that way, but, at any rate, it won’t excite comment.” Her soft fingers had placed his on her arm as she spoke. “There now — lift up your feet; there are any number of hummocks. I don’t see how you got out here.”

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"I don't either," he murmured. They walked in silence together back across the darkened spaces of the wet grass into the moving throng. Another voice than Gray's was calling out the attractions of the two-faced lady, but the doctor was still resolutely exploiting the merry-go-round. It was the most unbelievable thing in life that Philip's hand should be clasped around her warm arm, bare except for the thin floating sleeve; the most impalpable, yet most subtle, stimulant seemed to proceed from the contact as the crowd jostled them.

He broke the silence abruptly to say: "How did you know this of me so quickly?"

"My grandmother had trouble with her eyes. I took care of her — we were alone when it was coming on."

"Did she go blind?"

"Yes; but she was old — nearly eighty."

"She did n't look anything like as old as that when I saw her." Philip nerved himself. "I don't know what you've thought of me — but I've wanted always to apologize to you for my rudeness some years ago. There never was any excuse — there is n't now, but I must tell you ——"

"Pray don't," interposed Miss Hallowell,

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with an instant return to that manner which made a delicate porcelain barrier around her which only could be broken through disastrously, no matter how he chafed at it. "I've quite forgotten. I'm sure you will oblige me by not referring to any time when we may have met before."

"Certainly," murmured Philip with a secret and dogged resolution to yet find a way over that barrier whether she would or no.

"And shall I leave you with Mr. Davis or with Mrs. Lumley over there?"

"No, no; please don't leave me! Not yet!" cried Philip in genuine alarm. This hold on her arm, which was as warm as she was cold, was n't a privilege to be lightly foregone — to feel her sympathy going from him made him desolate indeed. His step faltered as if some sustaining quality had already departed — it claimed her alert attention instantly.

"Mr. Johnson, I can't leave you alone, yet I must get back to Mr. Dunning; he wants to go home early. You can't keep walking around by yourself."

"Any more passengers for the Ferris wheel?" The stentorian tones of Davis

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Faulkner sang out from the platform beside them. "Ladies and gentlemen, the trip to the starry spaces will begin in thirty seconds — twenty seconds — fifteen. Here, Constant, you can't escape me like that! You and Johnson pile in and fill up this game." He pulled them both up the steps as he spoke, in spite of Miss Hallowell's laughing protests.

"Nonsense, you've got plenty of time! You'll be out in five minutes. I'll strap you in safely. There! Off you go!"

The great wheel began to revolve, turning slowly. The seats were not all filled, notwithstanding Faulkner's loud urgings — the slight disarrangement of the machinery earlier had deterred some of the more timid spirits. Near as he was to his companion now, he knew, as they swung off into space, that the slightest obtrusion of his own personality would push him further from her than he had ever been; all the more so that he felt, at the kind smile she had turned on him as he had taken his place beside her, that her yielding to Faulkner's plea was in the nature also of a concession to himself, a last indulgence such as one gives to a crying child. A few moments and she

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would have done with him. What could he do to keep her?

He glanced at her furtively. She was leaning backward, her eyes cast down. She looked very soft and white in the clear gloom — one hand held a light scarf around her bare throat, the other lay on her white gown. The wheel made one revolution, bringing forth laughing shrieks from couples in the swinging cars below. Another revolution — one more, and the silent trip would be at an end.

One more! As the car in which they sat hung at the zenith the wheel hitched and stopped short, suddenly, trembled a little as if striving to go on, and then stuck — this time hard and fast.

II

AFTER the first shock of surprise, and the rapid questionings and reassurances from below, Philip and his companion settled down quietly to wait for release. He felt an extraordinary triumph in the situation; whether she wanted to or not, she would

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have to stay with him for a while longer. There seemed to be a great deal of tinkering and consultation and bustle going on beneath them, and a ladder was called into requisition to help off the occupants of the lower cars. The car that hung down behind them was empty, and the one in front was occupied by a couple embracing peacefully in full view of all spectators. Their own position seemed peculiarly isolated — the very commonplace-ness of the scene below lent an air of mystery and exaltation to their detachment from it. The white tents loomed up through the semi-darkness with those gimlet-points of light around them; portions of the dark, moving crowd were now straggling apart, now welded together; over by the grape-juice stand the tingling noise of glasses mingled with the voices of the barkers and the faint strains of the band in the circus tent, still playing "Waltz Me Around Again, Willie." Here swung up under the belated moon that passed and re-passed through those shifting clouds, he and she had left earth behind. The soft, damp breeze that blew the strands of her hair from her forehead and touched the lips of both might have come from some spirit world far, far beyond.

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Yet, as he looked at her he raised his hand involuntarily to his eyes.

"Do they pain you?" she asked at once.

"No, not really." His tone took on a new earnestness. "You don't know how much better you're making me feel. For the last few hours I've been going down bodily into the depths; I'd gone almost clear under when you came."

"Oh, you must never do that; you must never let yourself go, whatever happens," said Miss Hallowell, turning to him with a lovely note in her voice. "It's the only thing that really matters. I've found that out, when — perhaps you know that there is no one left belonging to me? — there have been times that looked pretty hard ——" Philip felt her clear eyes on him. "Yet I never had the worst to suffer; I didn't lose courage, because — but maybe you don't care to hear?"

"Oh, I do," protested Philip.

"All the time I was so sure of being helped that I *rested* in it. I never felt alone. It wasn't anything I did — it was just — God — and the people who are gone, who are a part of Him. And that makes me feel so sorry when I see anyone who is discouraged,

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for I could n't have *lived* if I had been discouraged." Her tone, in spite of the startling sentiment of her words, was sweetly, frankly matter-of-fact, as if the words were usual ones, that had been often said. "You see, even all my people — dying — did n't make that kind of difference to me. They had always cared for me — oh, more than you can imagine! Anything that hurt me hurt them — and I have always felt that they were living, though we call that kind of life dying, because we don't know any other name for it. I have always felt helped — and loved. And that is what makes me so sorry for those who are discouraged — because I've been so fortunate; to help them is the only way I can give back the help that has been given to me. Perhaps you think it's odd for me to speak in this way — but it's just my profession of faith, the thing that I *have* to tell, so that people will understand."

"I see," said Philip, with as much of the same matter-of-factness as he could command, and the swift thought that if the heart company of the dead had so encircled her, it must have been all the heart company she had known. With that thought came,

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unbidden, another, of the stout, cheerful mother, the frost-bitten aunt, and the cherubic grandmother, their prosaicness somehow transfigured by their adoration of the girl; tender women who had been hurt by anything that hurt their child. A picture came before him; he seemed to see with surprising vividness for the first time — as if that picture had been transferred from Constant's brain to his — the long winter days when she had waited for his letter, which never came, sensitively pretending that she did n't expect it, so that those kind eyes would n't suffer for her — a poor, little, shaming maiden-tragedy of non-fulfillment.

"We talked about life and death once before," he said soberly.

"Yes!" She turned to him a face of light, though her vivid smile did not seem for him. The moonlight was in her voice; as the breeze lifted she held her scarf closer around the soft whiteness of her bare throat. "That was a wonderful hour; it has always seemed part of a dream. Did you ever find your rule of life?"

"No, I've managed to get along famously without it. I've always got what I wanted. I remember you thought everything would

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come to one if one only willed hard enough. Did you try it?"

She laughed. "Oh, yes! I spent my time willing things once. I wanted to live in a fairy story, and go to a ball every night and have a hundred roses sent me every day. Then I found that there are some people to whom things never come as they do to others; they have to find their happiness another way. Oh, my scarf, my scarf! There it goes."

The breeze had lifted it from her neck. They watched it floating away and downward; it made them seem very high above.

"Don't look down. It may make you dizzy," he commanded.

"Indeed, it does n't bother me at all," she returned with a quick change of tone. "Oh, is the wheel beginning to move?"

"Yes," said Philip grudgingly.

"Poor Mr. Dunning, I hope he's not worn out waiting for me. At any rate, I've made you forget your eyes for a few minutes."

"Oh!" said Philip, feeling extraordinarily taken aback. He went on stiffly: "Thank you, for your efforts. My eyes will need to be better; I've a lot of reading to finish to-morrow morning, and a criticism to write."

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"Mr. Johnson!" Miss Hallowell looked horrified. "You ought n't to try such a thing."

"It's got to be done."

"Well, then, let me help you!"

"Thank you. I don't wish to impose on your good nature," said Philip, indescribably annoyed at being considered only in a pathological light.

"Nonsense! Don't be silly!" She pleaded as if the cause were hers, not his. "Let me see. Will ten o'clock to-morrow be early enough? The sitting room won't be sufficiently quiet, nor the piazza. I'll come out to the seat under the tree by the brook."

"Very well," said Philip, "if you insist. But," he added irritably, "I can see quite well enough to do my own writing yet."

As he stepped out of the car on to the platform he bumped clumsily against someone and, looking up, saw the sallow, smilingly expectant countenance of Dunning. It was like giving up Constant to the maw of a crocodile. With the cool adroitness of experience he pressed the out-stretched, detaining hand of Mrs. Lumley, without stopping on his way to join a party of friends who, broadly outlined in the near-by circle of an

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electric light, were evidently leaving the show. A few moments later their motor had deposited him at The Nook.

Philip woke the next morning in what he himself realized was an abominable temper. He felt as cross and fractious as a spoiled child. Everything seemed to have jarred on him from the night before — what he had said and what he had n't said. He had spent half the evening with Miss Hallowell, yet what use had he made of it? All the interest she had in him was simply as regarded his eyes. His eyes! He could n't get rid of the ache, or burn or blur — whatever it was, it was there waiting for him as soon as he got up. It was folly to boast that he could read or write anything. Would Constant keep to her offer, which he had met so boorishly? He had promised himself last night to telephone to town the first thing in the morning for some roses for her — but now in his discouragement the idea seemed to have lost its pressing insistence. She was not a girl who expected such attentions; any later time would do as well to send her flowers. He began to feel that enormously undermining power of self-sacrifice in another, against which it is one of the most difficult things

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in life to stand morally upright. But the next instant his face had reddened at the stinging thought that, sheeplike, he was following the path he had scorned. He hurriedly dressed and telephoned for the roses; he wanted to order a hundred, but contented himself with half the number. He had a wild desire to shower gifts upon her, which it chafed him to curb for the looks of things. He could do nothing this morning that made him pleased with himself.

He had hoped to see her at breakfast, but he had overslept and was late to the meal; nearly everyone had disappeared from the long tables, where napkins rolled into rings of birch bark, or fastened into strange shapes by pins, lonesomely indicated the places of their owners. There remained at the board only Mrs. Freeling and her son, Banker by name, a mild, pale, greedy-eyed little boy, whose small hand always reached out for any remnant of food left upon the white dishes within his radius, though his mother sought unfailingly to keep his wants supplied. She greeted Philip now with a warmth that soon explained itself.

"I see you don't take cereal. If you don't use all your cream in your coffee, would

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you mind letting my little boy have it ? Now, I do hope I'm not robbing you. Banker likes cream on everything, even his fish-cakes. Miss Hollowell usually leaves some in her pitcher, but she seems to have taken it all this morning; some people eat so heartily ! Banker, dear, those are Mr. Johnson's muffins. Oh, very well, then, love; say 'thank you' to Mr. Johnson. Are you going on the walk, Mr. Johnson ?"

"No," said Philip shortly.

"I promised to go, but I am a little uncertain about leaving Banker," proceeded Mrs. Freeling tentatively. "He wants to stay at home and play with the other boys, but I don't feel that it's exactly safe to leave him unless someone keeps an eye on him. The last time when I came back I found him crying under the sofa, because those rude boys threw mud at him. When I heard that Miss Hollowell was n't going I just mentioned the subject to her casually, but she did n't respond at all, although people say she's so obliging. Anyone can see that she is just crazy over Mr. Dunning. She kept him out on the side-piazza until twelve o'clock last night, talking; Mrs. Lumley told me that she heard them out

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there. Sweet little woman, that Mrs. Lumley — she is so sincere.”

“Very,” said Philip dryly.

He escaped as soon as he could, and went back to his room until the walking-party had started off in form, with drinking-cups and cameras slung over their shoulders. Then he went down on the porch and waited at the end of it, apart from that group of eternally embroidering matrons. Miss Hallowell came past once, but she merely bowed as she hurried on. After a while he took the book under his arm and, stick in hand, wandered off with a pretence of jauntiness, feeling very forlorn and alone. There had been times before when a mere eyelash in his eye had nearly driven him crazy; now, he was always trying to brush something out of his eyes that would n't brush out — that was there, no matter what he did. He found his way to the seat under the big chestnut tree, with a brook gurgling over the stones under some arching bushes at the side. He threw himself down on the short, warm grass, and opened his book, a new and weighty tome on the Egyptian dynasties, a subject on which he was recognized as a sincere, if minor, authority.

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There were mistakes in this which he particularly wished to point out, and conclusions from which he differed. But the effort was hopeless; he could n't read half a dozen words consecutively. All those nights and days when he had worked so hard, regardless of warning, they were all, all in vain! What remained? As he sat there with his head in his hands those awful thoughts made him their prey once more. He lived many years in darkness, left out of everything—he was dying, still in darkness.

“Oh, you 're here!”

“I beg your pardon.” For a moment, in that dreary tunnel of his days, he had forgotten even Constant Hallowell. “I thought you'd re-considered your determination.”

“No, I came as soon as I could.” She sat down beside him, her white skirts making a circle on the grass, and took up the book. Her presence near him seemed to breathe, as ever, both alluring warmth and freshness, but her tone was the entirely businesslike one of a trained nurse. “You should n't have tried to read. I've brought my fountain-pen and a pad to take down your dictation. I'm not a very rapid

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stenographer; you must have patience. You want to go over some of this, don't you?"

"The last chapter, if you please," said Philip submissively.

The dreamy girl of the moonlit space had gone; but it was an intelligent woman who put her mind at his disposal now. The tones of her voice in reading were just what they should have been; he almost lost consciousness of her in his interest in what those tones conveyed. When she put the book down and started in to take down his dictation her coöperation was at once stimulus and light.

She was quick to find the references he wanted, quick to perceive their bearing on his point; when he stopped to formulate she divined at once, with no little correlative misunderstandings. She waited delicately on his mind, without interposing her own idea of what he might want.

The sun grew high above them — veered to the westward. When the work was finished, it was one o'clock, and dinner was at half-past.

"I must go in now," said Constant.

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"Oh, wait a moment!" he urged. "You've been so good to me. You must be tired."

"Not at all," she returned politely. "I've been very much interested. I think you've done fine work this morning!"

"Sort of swan-song, eh?" said Philip grimly, and taking tally of the dazzling flecks of sunlight that wavered through the leaves over her hair, her cheek, her bare arms, and the whiteness of her dress. "I sent for some roses for you to-day. I hope you won't be offended."

"Sent for roses for *me*?"

Philip quailed; it was the tone he dreaded. He felt hot and crestfallen. "Oh, please like them," he pleaded. "Are you to be the only person to give? But I don't want you to dislike them and keep them; I wanted them to give you pleasure." In spite of himself, his voice trembled. "I wanted them to please you so much that you would n't give one away to a person in the house."

"Well, then, they shall please me just as much as that," she said quickly, with a sweet humouring of his mood.

"Why could n't you have said that before?" he murmured hotly.

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"Do leave your eyes alone!" She snatched his hand down from them. "For heaven's sake, don't rub them any more. Why do you look like that? We have had such a pleasant morning."

"Have we? I've never been so miserable in my life. I begin to know what slow torture means ——"

"Oh, don't! don't!" Her professional tone was entirely gone; it had given place to a note of yearning pity. "Oh, please, don't say that! Can't I do anything? Here — let me put my hand over your eyelids for a minute; I've dipped it in the brook. Is that better?"

"Yes," said Philip, longing to snatch the hand and kiss it. "Will you come out here again this afternoon? It's so nice and cool."

She shook her head. "I'm afraid not. I've promised to play cards with Mr. Dunning — he gets so tired of reading."

"Oh, he's fortunate," said Philip. "Now, I ——" He made a gesture full of bitterness.

"Oh, yes, yes, Mr. Johnson, I *will* come! For a little while — at four o'clock. I'll bring something to read. But I can't come earlier."

"Very well," said Philip in secret triumph.

A Clear Field

He would get ahead of Dunning, anyway; he would have what he wanted!

At four o'clock! The hours lagged till then. He passed through the sitting room twice after dinner, and saw her sitting back in the corner by a closed window, *tête-à-tête* with Dunning over the card-table. He heard Dunning's pleased laugh as she spoke. He might be ill, Philip thought grudgingly, but not so ill as to let her drag her own chair over for herself; not so ill as to have to keep a girl indoors all this bright summer afternoon and let her wait on him hand and foot — he was the kind of a man who would keep his wife waiting on him hand and foot all her life.

Philip himself took his pipe and went to the trysting-place early — too early, for the time lagged still more in that green solitude, where every leaf seemed tremulous for her coming. He dozed a little, and woke up with a sense of joy; the clock in the steeple of the white village church in the valley below was striking four. Five minutes past — five more — ten more — another ten — she had not come. He walked up and down, up and down. The light grew long and slanting; far off a crow cawed across the quiet field beyond the woods; apart from that there

Just for Two

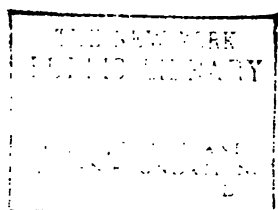
was an utter silence. The hour was immeasurably peaceful, but Philip felt anything but peaceful; he was consumed by an unrest such as he had never dreamed that he could experience. Why did n't she come? Why did he have this to bear when he had so much to bear anyway? His imagination filled the emptiness beside him with her lovely figure. He could see her sitting beside him, white-gowned, leaning a little toward him, so near that he could have put his arms around her (next time he *would* put his arms around her), yet when he turned she was not there. There are moments when the sense of the absence from the beloved person is so great that it partakes of the nature of eternity — one seems to be deprived of it forever and forever.

Philip realized desperately that this was no pleasurable state of attraction, such as had stirred him many times before for charming women; he was possessed instead by the malady of love — no phrase, but an ailment as torturingly, feverishly real as the small-pox, and as impossible to get relief from at will.

She was coming now! He hastily took a couple of steps down the path, caught himself by the branch of a tree from falling over



SITTING BACK IN A CORNER BY A CLOSED WINDOW, *TÊTE-À-TÊTE* WITH
DUNNING OVER THE CARD-TABLE



A Clear Field

its projecting root — and was confronted by the oncoming figure of Mrs. Lumley.

It was impossible ever to mistake Mrs. Lumley for anyone else. She walked by a "method," leaning obviously upon her spinal column, her chin elevated, and her feet pawing the ground in front of her, with a little backward rest on each one before advancing the other. When she sat down she sat down altogether, so to speak, in one comprehensively relaxing movement, without preparatory bendings or adjustment.

But she did not sit down now — she came on to where Philip stood awaiting her, smiling. She was dressed in a lilac muslin all laces and ruffles, with an air of pending festivity about her.

"Well, of all things! I was just wondering if I'd find you here," she said, agreeably, smiling up at him. "Don't you want to go on with me to the Stillwells' ? They're having a tea this afternoon, and I'm to pour."

"Thank you, I'd love to, but I'm afraid I'm not in trim," said Philip with a dramatic glance at his creased flannels. He mendaciously forestalled any demurring encouragement. "Besides, I've an engagement myself at five."

Just for Two

"Oh, I'm so sorry," said Mrs. Lumley, easily, with graceful relinquishment. "Do walk along a little way with me, anyway. Really, I envy you your afternoon out here; we've been having such a time at the house — Mr. Dunning has had one of his attacks. I think he ought to have a nurse, but I suppose he does n't want the expense. He always thinks he's dying, you know, but he never really accomplishes it. Poor Miss Hallowell had to rush off for the doctor — the telephone is out of order — and get hot-water bags and all sorts of things. I think she does entirely too much — she looked desperately tired; but, as she said, there really did n't seem to be anyone else to do it. I can't stand that sort of thing, myself, at all; it affects my nerves at once. I just went to my room and locked myself in, and I did n't get any peace there; Mrs. Freeling was spanking Banker, across the hall. She spans him every afternoon, so that you can *never* take a nap; the walls are so thin you can hear everything. Well, I suppose you can't come any farther. Take care! Did n't you see that stump?" She stopped and looked at him with surprise. "You walk as if you were lame."

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"Yes, I've sprained my foot a little," said Philip quickly. "I'm afraid I can't go on with you now."

"Well, good-by, then!" she smiled up at him, giving him her hand in lingering farewell. "By the way, if your foot troubles you, how would you like to go with me for a little spin to-morrow morning? I'm to have Mrs. Stillwell's runabout; she's going to town."

"Ah, town claims *me* to-morrow — worse luck," said Philip lightly. "Thank you, just the same, for thinking of me. And for heaven's sake, keep out of my way," he added savagely to himself, as he retraced his steps and sat down moodily on the bench beneath the tree. Could n't that woman ever realize that if he wanted her society he was capable of asking for it? He bent his head upon his hands. What was he to get out of life, anyway? What he had got this afternoon — nothing? He heard a soft rustle of skirts, and looked up to see Constant Hallowell. She had her arms full of roses, and she came straight over to him, sitting down at once and bending toward him, saying anxiously, as he did not lift his head:

"I hope you did not mind. I really could n't come before."

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"Oh, I minded fast enough — more than I ever minded anything in the world, but I heard — I knew you were kept away," he mumbled. He knew that he should ask if Dunning were better, but the words stuck in his throat. It was terrible to feel as lost in the world as he had been doing. He blindly stretched out his hand and took hold of a fold of her white gown, without speaking.

"Oh, you poor boy!" she said below her breath, as if she had divined everything that he would say. She murmured a few minutes afterward, as if the words were wrung from her:

"And I can do so little for you!"

"You're comforting me now, lots. You know it, don't you?"

"Yes."

"And do you like the roses?"

"Very, very much. I love the roses."

"That comforts me, too. Your voice sounds a little breathless, as if you were tired. I shall begin to judge everything by sound soon, shall I not? *Are* you tired?"

"I'm resting now. Yes, I'm tired, but it's not the kind of tired that hurts. I got the doctor in time; everything is going nicely

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at present. I wish I could make you feel better!"

"Do you? Will you let me say what a cad I was once upon a time?"

He could feel her involuntarily stiffen, before she answered gently, after a slight pause: "You may say anything that you want to."

"Well, then, forgive me!"

"Oh, I forgave you long ago. I could n't forgive myself for being such a foolish, dreaming, impossible sort of child." Her face flushed. "But I came out to read to you — not to talk. Shall I begin? They say that this is very amusing."

"If you please," said Philip humbly, yet with a secret thrill of triumph. He had got his way, after all.

He never knew what she read about. When she had finished the story and went back to the house to dress for the evening meal, he delayed following; he felt clean drunk with the thrill of her presence, her cool, helpful hand, the beautiful, candid curves of her figure, the candid tones of her lovely voice. She was the Goddess of Compassion! Oh, she was the woman he loved as he had never thought of loving anyone.

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He leaned upon his hands, dizzy. Impersonal as was her interest for him, yet it would go hard with him if he could n't make it personal — if he could n't lure her heart to him while she pitied. Every advantage his position could give him he would take.

Other women had n't regarded him as unlovable! She was so divinely young in spite of her sweet years of discretion — younger than he had been since the age of fourteen, as he felt with an amused, sacred, adoring tenderness. She had carried his image once in her heart — he could make it live if he had a chance. And he had it — if she did n't know where her compassion would lead her, he did! It should bring her to him. The very greatness of his calamity would make the claim on her hold past all breaking.

The man Dunning, poor fool — what claim on her pity could he have compared with the claim of one to whom she would be eyes and light and the very means of communication between him and his kind — a man who was going blind? If he could n't win her with that need —

A man who was going blind! Philip raised his head and looked on the ball of the

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setting sun, fiery red between the trees. There was no glory of sunset, but dark, leaden clouds above and that ball of red fire, burning itself into his dull vision, his dull brain, as the word she had spoken to himself, scattered and seared him now, with the stricken knowledge of what this implied. He to snare her through her heavenly pity — let her bind herself for life to a helpless thing, a man who could n't tell daylight from dark, from whose sight her beauties must be forever hidden, who would n't know how to move or step, or live—who would even hardly know how to eat — a man who was going blind! He was filled with a breathless horror, a breathless loathing of himself so overpowering that it swept him off his feet; he lay upon the ground as if he had been hurled there, as if he would burrow into the concealing earth to hide himself now and forever. Tie her sweet beauty, her measurelessly loving heart to a thing like him!

“Oh, if I ever sink so low as that!” he muttered between his teeth, with clenched hands and a forehead damp with agony. Something seemed to break within him — the torture brought relief in its very sharpness. Oh, not all the unselfishness should be hers!

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His love turned into something ineffably gentle and strong and protecting, as he whispered to himself brokenly: "No, dear — dearest — I would n't let you do that. Dearest, lovely Constant, I'll never let you do that, never — so help me God!" A new, inexpressible tenderness, such as a mother might feel for her child, filled all his being.

He did not see her again until late in the evening. He was leaning against one of the piazza posts as she came past, some of his flowers in her belt.

"I have had such a day of roses. Are your eyes any better?"

"No — worse. But I'm going to town for a little while on the early train to-morrow, anyway." He was verifying his casual words to Mrs. Lumley. "I've some business to settle up; I'll be back at noon."

"But——" She hesitated, and then went on straightforwardly: "You ought n't to go in alone, ought you? Is n't it dangerous? And I don't think anyone else is going, in from here."

"It will be all right once I'm on the train. I'll take a cab when I get to town," asserted Philip.

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"Well, good-night!" she said, looking at him anxiously before she went. Something lay upon his sleeve — one of the long-stemmed, green-leaved roses that she had worn. It kept him company that night, in which he did not sleep, although he knew that vigil did not help his straining eyes.

He ate his breakfast alone the next morning. It was a brilliant day, with an intoxicating breeze and a blaze of sunshine that made him wince, and blotted out the whole world for an instant, as he fumbled with the catch of the gate; he had forgotten, in timing himself, that he could n't hurry. He swore under his breath with vicious intensity, and then caught himself up as Constant Hallowell ran down the path and her quick fingers found the catch.

"I'm going to put you on the train," she announced professionally. "You have n't much time to lose! Take my elbow as you did the other night. There!"

There was no time for conversation as they ran. More than all the moonlit solitude, or their communion by the brookside, this early morning nearness seemed the most intimate thing possible. He only spoke once to tell her briefly not to give him so

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much of the path, for the long grass was too wet for her, and to call out, "Thank you; good-bye; I'll be back at noon," as he stood on the steps of the last car. She did n't know, though he did, that after to-day he was to drop fathoms deep out of her life. He began to have the spent, languid feeling of the sick man — he felt that she had known it, and had looked at him anxiously from time to time. He would n't have the strength to keep his infirmity to himself much longer, any more than he would have strength to withstand her compassion much longer. When he got back again to-day, he would pack up his things and go to the house of his sister, although she was in Europe. Nay, why go back to The Nook at all? He could send for his things. The stabbing thought came next that he had never even heard her sing!

The life and stir in town were in a way diverting. He had a good deal to do, and even in his worst, most blinding moments, he managed to get along somehow; there was a feeling that he must store up everything he saw, to draw on in those days when he was to be walled in entirely — withdrawn from life. He went to the bank and drew

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out a large sum of money; the possession of money made one feel more prepared, stronger for what might happen. Doctor Warren, the oculist, would be back now, he found, in a week.

He took a fierce satisfaction in ordering more flowers for Constant, and chocolates, and a couple of new books. His errands took him past the optician's, for whom he felt a strong aversion. He could see the dark form of that jewel-eyed, unsympathetic assistant through the plate-glass window, even now bending perfunctorily toward a customer. Philip hurried past the shop on his return to his cab, which was blocked a little farther down, only to hear his name called as he had his foot on the step.

"Mr. Johnson! Mr. Johnson!"

"Why, Mr. Stein!" said Philip, as, turning in surprise, he almost fell into the arms of a hatless, bushy-haired, gray-bearded man with enormous gold-rimmed spectacles. Mr. Stein's body, narrow, stoop-shouldered and wiry, seemed merely an accessory to his lion-like head and the shrewdness of his small eyes and kindly, puckered mouth. He laid hands on Philip now. "My dear sir, come with me back! I haf been telephoning all

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over the country for you. No results — and now you are about to pass me, already yet! My letter did not reach you?"

"Why, no," said Philip, taking the chair to which the old man had hurried him perforce through the shop, stationing him at one of the small tables below the barometers. Mr. Stein planted himself in the little chair exactly opposite, his knees touching Philip's as he leaned forward and clipped off Philip's glasses neatly, holding them up to the light, and wiping them off with one of the pieces of tissue-paper on the table, before looking through them again, with little snorts and mutterings. His body seemed to shrink and become of less and less value, a merely unimportant accessory to that wonderful bushy head and fathoming intelligence. His eyes pierced Philip, as he said:

"You did not get my letter? So. You haf been wearing the wrong glasses. My son, he mixed them. The gentleman who got your glasses, he haf a very strong 'stigmatism — he brought them back last night. I do not know how you see with these."

"I *have n't* been seeing!" cried Philip indignantly. His anger flamed forth. "My

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eyes have been entirely chewed up; I thought I was going blind. I don't know but what they have ruined my eyesight, anyway."

Mr. Stein puckered his lips and waved his hand. "No, no! They are strain', of course — but they get all right again. You are near-sighted, very, but your eyes are strong; they are very strong — they are very strong. Now, put on these," he tendered another pair to Philip. "That's a different thing, *hein?* These fool boys, they ruin my beesness! You bathe your eyes in some hot water and sit out-of-doors where it's green and quiet, and rest them two — three days, and you will be all right. Now, don't you let anyone scare you about your eyes; I look after you. You do your work, and I look after your eyes — *hein?*"

"Yes," said Philip. Heavens! what a difference those accustomed lenses made to his orbs, now that the other accursed pair were gone. They were like a healing touch after that darkening, wavering blur that had sickened him bodily, but even that was nothing to the relief of that healing touch to the mind. He tore along with a swift, swinging stride, with a joy in the sureness of his step that made mere life itself a revel.

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People turned in the street that day to look at Philip; he seemed the embodiment of strength and joyfulness of heart — and he laughed with delight in the face of the world.

It was still early when he got out of the train which shuffled in at the little station, and, before it went bustling out again, gave long whistling shrieks to tell everyone that the one-fifty-five had come. As he took the path to The Nook Philip breathed in, as never before, that intensely vivifying atmosphere that is part of a not-too-warm summer's day at two o'clock in the afternoon, when there are few people out, but every insect chirps and drones or buzzes; when the wayside grass and weeds are sunned down to the very heart of things, and send out an indescribable warmth of perfume, and the open fields and the blue, open heavens give a free openness of heart. There is a sense of beauty, and a dear, natural, earthly yet heavenly longing that is in itself a sort of bridal of earth and spirit. The beauty of the day, the hour, seemed somehow like Constant's. Yet, as he strode easily along, a new thought suddenly called him to a halt — in another moment the turn of the road would bring him within sight of The Nook. That

A Clear Field

long whistle of the train — if she had heard that — would she possibly be on the lookout for him? And if she saw him like this — if he did n't *need* her, how much would he get of her? Oh, in time, he swore to himself, he would get all, all — but without that strong plea of weakness it would take a hard fight! He was n't afraid of the outcome; if he wanted, he'd have! but the time, he grudged that! It would take time to warm her glinting iciness; she could be almost unbelievably difficult.

He went on slowly and yet more slowly, meeting the rush of another thought, a smile growing at the corners of his mouth. What if he did not tell her of the change? *That* thought drove all else before it. Some foretaste of triumph had gone to his head — the very sharpness of his self-denial before seemed to make this soft deception allowable now. Oh, she should forgive him — afterward! Who was he, to forego when he need n't?

As he turned the corner, he looked up. Constant Hallowell was gazing down the path; the conventional cut of her white frock could n't disguise the lovely lines of her figure as she leaned forward into the sunlight that rayed her shining hair. Per-

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haps it was because his eyes were fixed upon her that he stumbled slightly. The next instant she had run to him, smiling with relief.

"I was so afraid something had happened to you," she said, and slipped his thrilling hand around the curve of her arm.

Oh, if she did not know why her cheeks flushed, *he* did!

The Cloisonné Vase



The Cloisonné Vase

GOING at one hundred and fifty; going —going — *gone*.” The auctioneer’s hammer fell impressively on the table at the far end of the long room, which, level with the avenue, was hung on either side with Oriental rugs.

Katherine Ludlow drew a long breath, and then laughed, while the colour rose to her face; her fingers still tingled with the excitement of the past few minutes as she looked at the Cloisonné vase for which she had been deliriously bidding and which was now hers. The moment her gaze had fallen on it, after straying into this place, she had felt that she must have it for a present to her husband on his birthday; he was not the kind of a man whom you would have suspected of a passion for Cloisonné, and his wife was proud of the taste.

The bidding had begun seductively low; the vase, displayed on a black pedestal in all its sinuous overlaying of pale blue and deep blue and opaline green and rose, had seemed

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to be hers at first for a mere song. Katherine had never been at an auction before, and her tall figure in its tight-fitting plum-coloured suit had straightened itself; her bright head with its black-plumed hat was held still higher with each advancing bid, as though in readiness for any leap. She was conscious in every nerve of her daring, while mentally marshalling all her sources of payment; although she had an income of her own, at the moment she had but ten dollars in the world. She was accustomed, however, to taking chances and coming out ahead — if her beauty were a factor in her usually getting what she wanted, she took no account of it herself.

She heard the auctioneer and his associate congratulating her now on her acquisition — the sale was over for the day. "If there had been any dealers present, you would never have got it at such a figure, Madam." But his next words filled her with dismay; she turned with eager appeal, after a few moments' consultation, to a man who approached smilingly from the back of the room.

"Oh, Mr. Wallace, I'm so glad you're here! I supposed, of course, that I could

The Cloisonné Vase

have the bill sent in for this the first of the month, like anything else — it's only a week off now. I bought the vase for Remsen's birthday, so I don't want *him* to know a thing about it. Do I *have* to pay for it now?"

"I'm afraid you do," said Mr. Wallace reluctantly. He was a slight, fair man, always smiling, and so extremely young-looking that one did not perceive at first that the lines of youth had somehow crystallized in his face, and that he was older than he seemed. The Wallaces were neighbours of the Ludlows, who saw rather a good deal of each other, Remsen having taken a fancy to Wallace, and walking with him to the station every day. Katherine had, in fact, parted from him and his wife, a rather quiet, colourless older woman, whom Katherine nevertheless rather liked, at a late hour on the night before, after an evening at bridge. He smiled encouragingly now into the dark eyes upraised to his.

"But see here, Mrs. Ludlow, don't let that bother you ——" He drew out a small cheque book from his pocket as he spoke. "You say you'll have the money the first of the month. Well, just let me be your

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banker until then — *that's* easily settled. I make out this cheque now for the vase, and you make out one to me next week. It's just a business arrangement, you see."

"Oh!" said Katherine. "Are you *sure* it's convenient?"

"Perfectly."

"Well, you *are* a friend in need," she responded gratefully. She began to laugh, now that the predicament was over, tilting her head so that the long black plumes touched her glowing cheek; her eyes under their curling dark lashes sparkled mischievously; she had that agreeable sense of coming out all right, no matter what she dared, that was both so natural and so exhilarating. Wallace, as he took off his hat to her as they finally parted on the sunlit pavements of the avenue, thought with pardonable self-approval that he had never seen her look so handsome before. She wanted the Cloisonné vase for her husband! One would certainly never have credited Remsen Ludlow with a fine and adequate sense of beauty if it were not for his selection of so exquisite a creature as his wife.

The contrast between them was always great, but as they sat to-night over the

The Cloisonné Vase

prettily appointed dinner table — Katherine, in spite of her ethereal appearance, was an excellent housekeeper — it seemed unusually marked. Remsen was heavily built and broad-shouldered, with an effect now of being roughly dressed; he had a brown moustache, closely clipped, deep-set gray eyes, and a thick nose; his only good features were his mouth, which had an unexpectedly sweet curve about the lips, and his square, well-shaped chin. There was a certain forcefulness about him which somehow informed his quietest moments; it seemed fitting to hear that he had risen from the ranks by his own efforts, and that all he had learned at college had been imbedded since in Iron.

Katherine, opposite him, with her exquisite colouring and in the daintiness of her pink gown, open at the throat, looked like the traditional porcelain vase lighted from within. His gaze lingered on her tenderly as she talked, but he himself said little until the maid had left the room. Then he asked after a moment's silence, "Well, what is it that's happened to-day, *Kathleen*?" He seldom used endearments in ordinary conversation, but he had a way of pronouncing his

Just for Two

variation of her name that seemed in itself a caress; it conveyed a tender acknowledgment that she was beautiful and fragile and adorable and his wife.

"Happened!" She laughed and reddened a little. "Nothing has happened. Why do you ask?"

"I don't know. Have you been anywhere?"

"I went into town this afternoon."

"I hope you did n't go shopping."

"No, I did n't."

"Because," continued her husband, "it's my painful duty to break the news to you that you won't get any rent from that famous house of yours next month, nor for the month after, most likely. The tenants have struck for a new roof."

"Remsen!"

"Heartless of 'em, is n't it?" He leaned around the table, dragging the chair in which she sat to a place beside him, and placing one hand on her slight waist. "The worst of it is that I can't advance it to you, as usual, just now; I'll even have to ask you to go slow on the house allowance—we're waiting on payments. Well—you're not needing anything very badly, are you?"

The Cloisonné Vase

I thought you'd bought all your winter things."

"Oh, yes!"

"What is it, then?" He lifted her lovely face up to his. "If you wanted to spend all you had for my birthday present — Ah, *that's* it! Well, cut it out, Kathleen — give me something you've made yourself."

"You speak too late; I've already got your present," said Katherine with spirit. "See here! I'm tired of being always told to give you some little thing I've made myself. Men never care for cheap home-made presents — women do, but men don't; they like something that's solidly and expensively *good*, and that's the kind of thing I've bought for you."

"All right," said her husband in a tone that showed that his interest in the subject was waning. It was one of her wistful minor disappointments in life that Remsen so seldom cared to discuss his likes and dislikes with her — the subject seemed ended in the fact that he *had* either a like or a dislike.

As she escaped from him now to get ready for the card party at which they were both due, she felt that what should have been the staggering fact of having no money to meet

Just for Two

her obligations, had only the effect, after the first breathlessness of realization, of making her spirits rise unaccountably. She knew that she had some small invested funds, but she did not dare ask Remsen if she could sell anything; he would question her minutely as to why she wanted to, and she could n't explain; she must find some other way. She was still musing, with brightened eyes, when her husband came in to hurry her, and incidentally to fasten the clasp of the odd, silver-linked necklace with its carved green stones and the heart-shaped pendant that made her white throat the whiter. He kissed the place where it lay.

She was abstracted all the way over in the cab, and even after they reached the scene of entertainment where, although it was the appointed hour, the haste of belated preparation was embarrassingly evident — the card tables being brought forward and dusted by untidy servants, and the chairs foraged for from all parts of the house — Mrs. Robinson, the hostess, who had been in town until dinner time, cheerfully vaunting the fact that entertaining was never any trouble to *her*.

Katherine had not known whether Wallace would be of the bridge party or not, but

The Cloisonné Vase

when he entered, as she was trying to attend to Louise Harner's admiring remarks about her necklace, her eyes leaped to meet his with a mischievous confidence in them to which his responded encouragingly, before she turned to his wife. The latter had the appearance of being much older than her very young-looking husband; she dressed always in clinging pale-hued garments that made her seem still thinner and more colourless. She was languid in her motions and in her low voice, the latter, however, being always assiduously heard by her husband when she spoke to him, no matter in what part of the room he might be; her reserve seemed to make his boyish lightness the more apparent. Some people said that she kept a pretty good lookout over him, but if that were so it apparently did not impair the ease and security of their relations.

Katherine, however, soon forgot about her entirely in the desire to speak to Wallace himself. She watched with growing anxiety during the evening for some chance to throw him in her way at one of the card tables, though her husband was, distractingly, twice her partner. Remsen filled one test of a gentleman in looking his best in evening

Just for Two

dress, and Katherine unaccountably never felt so fond of him as when it was impossible for him to use any manifestation of affection toward her. It was not until the refreshments were served that she found Wallace at last by her side with a plate of salad.

"Oh, Mr. Wallace!" she murmured quickly, with a voice full of suppressed eagerness; "I've been wanting to speak to you so much. Bend over a little, won't you, please? I'm afraid Mrs. Starling will hear. Can I see you at your office to-morrow some time?"

"Yes, indeed," responded Wallace promptly, smiling with an easy kindness that seemed to take the request as a matter of course.

"At three o'clock then?"

"If that suits *you*," said Wallace.

II

THE Cloisonné vase came the next day. Katherine had the box carried up to her room and opened it herself by the aid of a hammer, taking the treasure out of its inner

The Cloisonné Vase

wrappings of odd Oriental paper. There was an odd Oriental perfume that seemed to breathe not only from the wrappings but from within the vase itself, as if it had been filled with roses and sandalwood — the auctioneer had said it was an old piece. Perhaps some woman's hand had dropped the attar of roses in it once! The perfume gave the subtle sense of mystery which clings to the East and especially to the life behind the curtain — Katherine felt the thrill of it as she sat on the floor gazing dreamily at the vase as it stood, in all its shimmering beauty of blues and greens and interlacing pink, on the inverted box by the prosaic modernness of her mahogany dressing table. Katherine had a childish habit of secretly kissing certain inanimate objects; she kissed the vase now, pressing her soft rose-lips against its hard surface—it seemed to make it more a part of her when she should give it to Remsen — before putting it in the box once more, to be hidden in her closet.

The clock had only just struck three when she appeared in the plum-coloured suit and the black-plumed hat in the doorway of Wallace's office, and was shown in by the office boy at once on giving her name. Wal-

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lace came instantly to greet her, with his quick, smiling friendliness; he pulled out an armchair for her, between the two big roll-top oak desks, and she sat down somewhat nervously, facing the light from the long, high window; her beautiful eyes, when she lifted them to his, were clouded as if by some earnest thought, and her head, with its gold-thread hair, was bent forward anxiously. She began at once.

"I said I would pay you back that money the first of the month. Well, I can't pay it."

"Please, Mrs. Ludlow ——"

Katherine raised her slender, black-gloved hand. "No, don't speak; I've something to say. I thought I would have the money of my own in a few days — and I'm not going to have it after all. They want it for roofs — the tenants, I mean ——"

She fixed him with her eager gaze.

"Yes, I see," said Wallace encouragingly.

"So I've been thinking and thinking what to do — and last evening, at the bridge party, I thought of *this*." She fumbled with the clasp of her handbag, drawing from the latter a little crumpled roll of tissue paper, in which lay, half revealed, the silver-linked carved green necklace, with its dangling

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heart-shaped pendant. "You've seen this before, of course — I wear it so much. It's my very own — it was my grandmother's. I've always been told that it was very valuable. I thought that if I could sell it — Well, I've been to-day to a couple of jewellers — they were both terribly nice to me" — her sparkling eyes took on a look of pleased reminiscence — "but it's just this way: the necklace *is* very valuable, and yet it is n't! That is, if anybody wanted it they'd be willing to pay almost any price to get it, but there is n't what they called 'a market' for it ordinarily. But it's valuable, just the same." She paused with a triumphant effect.

"Yes, of course," agreed Wallace. The youthful lines in his face seemed graven in a way that made him look oddly older for the moment.

"They each said that in time it could be disposed of to advantage, but it would take time to find a customer — and *that*, you see, would n't do. I thought of going to a pawn-broker —"

"You did n't do *that*!" interpolated Wallace hastily, with a swift picturing of Katherine's tall loveliness in such a connection.

"No, I felt that Remsen would n't like it,"

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said Katherine simply. "Then I thought, why not bring it straight to you? Then you could keep it for the debt. So if you don't mind — I've brought ten dollars with me now." She laid the money on the desk beside him, and, leaning forward, slid the necklace, a little shining heap, into his open hand.

"But, my dear Mrs. Ludlow!" protested Wallace. As little imaginative as he was, the necklace had clasped her white throat, the pendant had nestled in her white bosom too often not to seem unwarrantably redolent of her sweetness. "*I don't want this chain; indeed, you must n't leave it with me.*" He essayed to force it back into her hand, but she shut her fingers tight as she shook her head obstinately.

"*Please, Mr. Wallace! I can't give my husband a present that you've paid for — why, it would n't be my present. But if you keep the necklace — and you must keep it — I'll feel that you are paid — in a way — until I pay you the actual money.*" She fastened on the signs of uncertainty in him. "Oh, I'll feel *terribly* if you don't keep it — I could n't *stand* it! Remsen would hate — Why, it's just as you were saying yesterday — it's a business arrangement."

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"Very well," said Wallace, with his eyes on her — perhaps there are few men who are not a little dazed by beauty. He rose, going over to the open safe, and, pulling out a small box, unlocked it, and, wrapping the necklace with the tissue paper, put it in, locking the box and placing it in the safe again, before he turned to her, with a smiling air of having put the whole subject out of mind. "There, your securities are safely disposed of; I hope you are satisfied."

"Next week I can give you twenty dollars," persisted Katherine, as she rose to go.

"And I am to keep the whole necklace, too? I ought to give you back a couple of links each time, to be truly businesslike. Let me go with you and see you across the street."

"No, no; please don't," said Katherine hastily. "I'd rather not —"

"Very well, then, I'll just put you in the elevator," said Wallace. As she went gradually downward in it out of his sight, the remembrance of his pleasant smile as he stood there, hat in hand, gave her a truly grateful feeling; his kindness had been so easily comprehending. She had not realized until she left him how excited she had been. It was

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a great relief now, however, to think that the vase was undoubtedly hers to give by right of purchase. Though everyone turned to look at her as she hurried out of the big building, and in the downtown street, crowded with men, she did not notice it; she was used to being stared at wherever she went, as a tiresome matter of course. She could hardly wait for Remsen's birthday on the morrow.

He was just as delighted as she could have wished when the vase was presented to him before the Sunday morning breakfast. Katherine dragged it out of the closet while she was still in a kimono, with her hair down, and Remsen took it out of its wrappings with sweetly teasing delays, guessing at all the things it could n't possibly be, watching the lovely fluctuations of colour in Katherine's face as she sat on a low stool beside him, and ceasing his efforts at times to kiss her demonstratively — the fact that she patently did n't want his kisses just then making her the more engaging. He was, as Katherine sometimes proclaimed, a very "man-y man" — his mood depended on his feeling, not on hers; she was not always sure that she liked the quality.

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But when he at last gave his whole attention to the matter of the present, and stood it unveiled, as she had done, on the inverted box, she had no fault to find with his appreciation; he sat completely silent for a moment, gazing at it. Katherine impulsively threw her arms, which had been cold to him, around the sinuous curves of those shimmering pinks and greens and blues, leaning her cheek against them; her hair made a soft cloud over one shoulder.

Remsen drew a long breath.

"By George, that's beautiful!" he said.
"Beautiful — *beautiful!*"

"Do you like it?" asked Katherine.

"*Like it?* I should think I did. How did you manage to get it?"

"At an auction," said Katherine. She had moved aside now to let him look at it more closely.

"No wonder you were out of money; why, this must be worth a fortune. How much did you pay for it?"

"You've no business to ask me how much I paid for your present."

"Nonsense! How much!"

"I won't tell you," said Katherine spiritedly.

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"Hello!" His keen eye had unerringly detected what had escaped Katherine. "There 's a flaw — a split down here near the bottom. I understand now; that 's what 's made it possible for you. You did n't know that, I suppose."

"No."

There was a silence in which he seemed to be examining the vase minutely. When he spoke again, there was a perceptible drop in his voice. "Well, it 's very beautiful, anyway, of course, only ——"

"Don't you care for it?" asked Katherine.

"Why, certainly. Why, Kathleen! Don't look like that. Only of course, when you know there 's a flaw — a smaller piece, if it is perfect, is preferable. This is very beautiful, but you can't help knowing —— I'd never, as a rule, take anything without being sure ——"

"All right, I'll let you choose your own presents after this," interrupted Katherine, with proud tears in her eyes, turning away to brush out her hair.

"Well, you'd better always let me see what you buy before you spend as much money as you probably did for this," said her husband with masculine tenacity. "Will

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you be down to breakfast soon? Then I'll go ahead and take this with me."

He shouldered the vase as he went off. Katherine could only feel, with a smart, how impossible it was to make him have the kind of sentiment she wanted, when she wanted him to have it. What difference did that little crack make when it was the thing her love had chosen for him? However, he did seem pleased with it, although the pleasure differed from that first incredulity and rapture — he went around trying it in different positions, placing it finally where they sat oftenest, in the library, on a tabouret, beside the dark glowing richness of the portières; the heat of the fire on the hearth brought out a wave of that odd perfume from within it. "It's really a wonderful piece of colouring," he said to Kathleen, with the nice consideration one gives to a child, pressing her shoulder tenderly as he added with that crude masculine tenacity; "but you'd better consult me another time."

"Oh, very well!" said Katherine, speaking gaily, though the heavy chain of her indebtedness was weighing on her — to keep paying for something that suited Remsen completely was one thing, but to keep paying

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for something that did n't——! She was already beginning to feel depressed at the sight of the vase.

But Remsen left her more money than usual the next morning—"So that you won't have to worry about catching up," he said, with what seemed too apt significance; it startled her sometimes to realize that for a man who disliked to discuss "feelings" he always seemed conscious of any change, however slight, in her.

He came back just as he was leaving to say:

"By the way, Katherine, Wallace and I have a scheme about the Club—can't you ask him and his wife around to-night?"

"Why, yes," said Katherine.

III

IN ANY small community bound together by the interlacing strands of social intercourse, not only do straws show which way the wind blows, but no straw is unnoticed. Everybody in the Thursday Evening Card Club knew that for the last six weeks there

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had been no evening at which Mr. Wallace and Mrs. Ludlow had been present without some sign of intimate and confidential converse between the two. Katherine's innocently flushing cheek, the first swift intelligence of her candid eyes, as swiftly veiled, when they met Wallace's, were matched by what seemed a certain caution underneath his smiling, open friendliness; when they talked apart, if only for five minutes, it was always with a singular effect of privacy.

"The most curious thing is that *she* always seems so eager to speak to *him*," said Mrs. Brownlow, with a sidelong glance in the mirror as she spoke. Mrs. Brownlow was striving to acquire what was fashionably spoken of this year as "the new figure"; it placed as its ultimatum a shapelessness and slimness into which she could not be successfully compressed and live, and the failure gave a certain acidity to her views.

"Oh, well, he and her husband are very intimate," responded her hostess, Mrs. Robinson, carelessly.

"Yes, I know," said Mrs. Brownlow with impatience. She harked back to the first theme. "It is n't their talking together — anybody might talk, of course — but it's

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something — *different*. I think it flatters him to have her act that way — she's so handsome. Not that there's anything in it, of course; *but* ——"

Katherine herself was quite unconscious of comment. There were moments when the debt, even though slowly decreasing, seemed to give her an awful, inexplicable panic, but when she had seen Wallace she always felt not only gratefully lighthearted but dauntless again — he was invariably "nice," making laughing protest against any immediate necessity for those payments which she dribbled out to him. She had once tried to give him the money at the Club, but the action was unpleasantly furtive, so that after that she only made appointments to go to his office, where she took her five or ten in what she felt was a scrupulously business way. The boy no longer asked her name; he showed her into the inner office immediately. She never wrote, because she felt as if Remsen might mind her doing that.

These visits to Wallace always gave her a pleasant foretaste of the triumph that would finally be hers when she could tell her husband of her predicament and her successful conduct of the affair. Katherine's single-

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mind, matter-of-fact nature was too absorbed in one idea at a time to notice some slight difference in Mrs. Wallace's attitude toward her on the Club evenings; the latter was as colourlessly well-bred, as languid and reticent as ever, yet there was indefinitely some delicate consideration in her manner to the younger woman — a suggestion of warmth, or even of protection — she seemed to sit near Katherine a good deal, even if she said nothing.

Remsen himself had been very much immersed in business lately; it was one of the ironies of fate that the vase, which indirectly occupied most of her thoughts, was unnoticed by him. He had been away off and on, losing two of the Thursday night meetings thereby, but had come back for the last one; he had, however, been so unusually taciturn that his wife had spoken of it as they walked home, and he had confessed to a headache.

On the evening after this, as he sat by the library table plodding over some papers, she concluded that the headache had not left him; he sat there sewing while he wrote, and looking up now and then to catch the smile he always gave her. In the midst of

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this quiet occupation the doorbell rang, and a moment later the slim figure of Miss Harner, loosely cloaked, dashed into the room, followed by the elaborately moulded form of Mrs. Brownlow, with pretty Mrs. Robinson still behind.

"Don't get up, *please*" — Miss Harner's voice had preceded her — "we're only here for an instant; it's about the play at the Guild to-morrow night. I'm to be an Egyptian girl, and I wanted to know if you'd be so *very* good, Mrs. Ludlow, as to lend me your green carved necklace; I'd take every care of it. We're on our way to rehearsal now."

"Why, certainly," said Katherine, before realizing that it was not in her possession.

"It's perfectly lovely of you," said Miss Harner warmly. "If you could give it to me now — I'll take the *best* care of it."

"No, I'll send it to you to-morrow," said Katherine, confused in spite of herself. "It is n't here at the moment; I have n't been wearing it lately."

"So I've noticed," remarked her husband idly. "Is it at the jeweller's?"

"No, it's in pawn," answered Katherine, with an audacious amusement in telling the

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truth that nobody would believe to be true. After they had all left, she put her arms around her husband's neck, still laughing, with an unusual tenderness in the action that brought a sudden colour to his face — he kissed both her hands before he put her gently aside to go on with his work.

The next morning Katherine went into town, and down to Wallace's office for the necklace, to be dismayed by the news that he was not in; he would, however, undoubtedly be back if only for a moment, before he went to lunch.

Katherine bethought her of a restaurant which women sometimes frequented, and, leaving word with the clerk to tell Mr. Wallace she would wait for him there, wended her way thither after some aimless walking around, choosing a table near the door where she could watch people go in and out as she ate; there were not so many women there as she had hoped. She lingered over her food as long as she possibly could, with no sign of Wallace; then she hurried back to the office again to be told that he had returned, but had gone out immediately on pressing business — he had had Mrs. Ludlow's message, but had said nothing

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in reply. He would be in at five, before he went home.

Katherine gasped. This time she wrote a little note, telling the situation briefly, and asking him to meet her on the five-thirty boat, and bring the necklace with him to give to her then. The clerk smiled as she handed the missive to him. Katherine was used to being smiled at, but never like that; something in it made her feel very strange and hot — she did not like it! All the time she was looking through the shops, filling in the hours until the five-thirty train, that smile haunted her. When she finally stood in the ferry house, scanning the throng for Wallace, she suddenly caught sight of her husband, at the same instant that he saw her.

"*Hel-lo!*" he said fondly, "I did n't expect to see you here. Come on, or we'll miss the boat. Were you looking for me?"

"No, I was looking for another man," said Katherine, her eyes dancing as before with the audacity of her truthfulness; she felt unexpectedly delighted to be with him, in spite of her perplexity, as he hurried her on to the boat and to the upper deck, where a little group of men and women were standing in the clear red glow that trans-

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figured the sparkling water and the further shore, the feathered hats of the women bent together as they talked. Katherine caught the words — “It begins to look very odd,” and a clear, carrying voice replied:

“She goes there all the time, they say; at any rate he saw her coming out of the office *twice* to-day! You can’t mistake that plum-coloured suit. *Oh — !*” There was a momentary gasp as Katherine drew near, and Mrs. Brownlow retrieved herself with incriminating haste.

“How do you *do*, Mrs. Ludlow! I was just saying to Louise Harner and Mrs. Taylor — you know Mrs. Taylor, don’t you? — how *much* plum colour is worn this year! I’ve seen it everywhere to-day!”

“Have you?” said Katherine. Her eyes took careless note of the group — the men, of whom Remsen’s big figure now made the prominent third, and the three conscious women beside her. “Dear me, there are seven of us, are n’t there? — with another one we could play bridge!”

“Here comes the eighth, then,” said Mr. Taylor. “Hello, Wallace, don’t you see your friends?”

“How are you all?” asked Wallace, stroll-

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ing forward, with comprehensive greeting. His eyes met Katherine's with quick apologetic assent to the quick questioning of hers; his hand carelessly touched his overcoat pocket before he went on.

"Fine night for the play, is n't it?"

"It scares me to think of it," said Louise Harner, pensively; "the only pleasant part of it is that I'm to wear Mrs. Ludlow's lovely green necklace. Oh, by the way, does anyone know whether the *Celtic* got in to-day?"

"I'll see," said Wallace promptly, pulling the evening paper out of his overcoat pocket at the same instant that Remsen, standing beside him, reached for his own. Something fell on the deck between the two men, with a little jingling sound — Katherine's green silver-linked necklace, with its heart-shaped pendant glittering in the brilliant light, lay spilled out of its wrapping of loose crumpled tissue paper, on the floor of the deck.

For a tingling, inappreciative instant it seemed as if no one drew breath; there was a telegraphic exchange of glances, and then Remsen stooped over and picked it up.

"That was horribly careless of me," he said, in the disgusted tone of one self-con-

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victed. "I should have put it in my inside pocket when the jeweler gave it to me. The clasp is all right now, Kathleen."

"Oh!" said Miss Harner wonderingly. "It looked for a moment just as if Mr. Wallace had dropped it. Did n't it?" She appealed to the others. "I was *so* surprised!"

"Not as surprised as Wallace would probably have been," said Remsen coolly, while Katherine watched him, fascinated. "Don't you want to give the necklace to Miss Harner now?" he admonished her.

"Why, yes," said Katherine, beginning to feel very queer. Emotions had been coursing through her like lightning flashes ever since those first permeating overheard sentences, and *now*—— How incredibly swift Remsen had been to see, how swift to act! And why — *why*? What did he think of her? Her mind was in a whirl, as they all left the boat together, she talking with Miss Harner while her husband on the other side of her conversed with Wallace and Mr. Taylor. When they were in the train and walking from the station, they were still in a group; it seemed as if they never would part company. At last, at last, they had reached the house!

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As Remsen flung the front door open, the warm air gushed out to meet them, laden with a sweet, faintish perfume — the perfume that came from within the Cloisonné vase that stood just inside the library; the smell of it sickened her as she went into the room, and stood there, waiting for Remsen to follow her. Instead, she heard him go downstairs to turn off something in the furnace; she thought impatiently that no matter what was happening Remsen could never forget the furnace.

When he came up he seemed to be fumbling with his overcoat in the hall. She could bear delay no longer; she called:

“Remsen! Are n’t you coming in here?”

“Why, yes.” His voice sounded as usual. “I thought you’d gone to take off your things.”

“No — oh, Remsen!” said Katherine. The tears had started to her eyes as he drew near her; her voice trembled. “Don’t you want me to explain?”

“Oh, no,” said Remsen carelessly.

“You *don’t*!”

He shook his head with a large indifference; his eyes, extremely brilliant, seemed to look beyond her. “Not unless *you*

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want to. If I thought there could ever be any *need* for explanation — where you were concerned — *Kathleen* ——”

He stopped short with a gesture that proudly dismissed the subject.

“But I *must* tell you,” said Katherine, her lip trembling; she began to feel that she would choke in another moment. She opened his folded arms and crowded herself into their circle, drawing a long breath as they closed around her with their accustomed tenderness; she tried to turn his face so that those brilliant eyes would seem to see hers. She had never thought of her husband as a handsome man, but at that moment she was thrilled with the recognition of some magnificence of power in him.

“You’ve got to let me tell you! It was all for you, everything!” She drew him down beside her on the big sofa, her coat half undone, her hat tipped back on her beautiful hair, clinging to his large hand as she told the story from first to last, in its every detail, while he sat, still looking before him. At the first offering of the cheque he seemed tacitly to agree, but when she had finished he said quietly, “And Wallace *let* you do all this?”

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"Yes, of course; I suggested everything; he was very kind."

"The unspeakable cad!" said Remsen, smiling. Nothing had ever struck such terror into Katherine's soul as that smile.

"Don't," she said involuntarily.

"Don't — what?"

"Don't look like that — you make me afraid. Are you so very angry with me?"

"With you? No."

"I would rather you blamed me a thousand times than blame *him* — it is so unjust," continued Katherine, with those hot tears in her eyes. "He only did what I asked him to! He was so kind. Would n't you have done the same for any other woman?"

He looked at her as if he hardly heard what she said. Then he answered sternly, "Not if her husband were my friend."

"Oh!" said Katherine painfully; she felt indescribably humbled, as if her womanhood had been struck. Her personality seemed to count for nothing. The incident was primarily between two men. Yet she struggled still further on to what she felt was the forbidden ground of words.

"I don't know why you speak like that to

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me! Mr. Wallace never — presumed, in any way.”

“*Presumed!*” said Remsen. His arms dropped to his side; the veins on his forehead suddenly stood out as he regarded her. For a moment Katherine felt dizzy, as if a tornado were about to sweep her off her feet and grind her to powder. “Presumed! And why *would* he have ‘presumed,’ as you call it, to my wife? Why should that be mentioned in his favour? Tell me that!”

“Oh, Remsen!” said Katherine once more; her voice broke, she buried her face in her hands, weeping helplessly.

In another moment he was leaning over her. He drew her hands down with gentle force, saying in a matter-of-fact tone of kindness: “Don’t cry any more. Go upstairs and take off your things, Kathleen.” He lifted her gently to her feet as he spoke; her eyes fell on the vase, and she burst forth: “I hate that thing! I’m going to put it where you won’t see it any more! I have n’t had a comfortable moment since it came into the house.”

“No, you’ll leave it just where it is. I like it very much,” said Remsen coolly.

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"It will teach you to remember not to keep anything from me in the future."

"Oh," said Katherine, shrinking from him in spirit as she responded to his kiss. She felt as captive as those women of the East, of whom that haunting perfume breathed.

And the sullen, inner rebellion of the captive began to grow in her in the days that followed. All intercourse with the Wallaces gradually ceased, yet in such a way that it was unnoticed. She knew that Remsen had paid Wallace; for the rest, the latter's presence grew more infrequent at the Club meetings, he took a later train than Remsen, and even in the street his embarrassed gaze avoided Katherine. She winced for him, and with shame at the injustice that made him the scapegoat of her fault; she cherished a hope of telling him how she felt about it, some day. Oh, her husband *was* unjust! It brought an additional pang of protest when she heard that the Wallaces were going to move away in the spring; she was sure that Remsen's attitude had prompted the move, although she heard Mrs. Wallace announcing later that Wallace always tired of a place very soon — she

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turned her pale-lashed, colourless eyes toward Katherine as she added languidly, with what seemed a special significance, "My husband is still only a boy."

IV

WITH the departure of the Wallaces the incident seemed closed, yet after all it had its epilogue. One bright day in early June Katherine was returning home by another road and ferry from a visit to a friend. There were but few people on the boat, and after she had seated herself, gowned in pale gray, with violets in her hat, she happened to look up, and saw the slight, nattily dressed figure of Wallace opposite; his face seemed extraordinarily young as it bent over the paper he held in his neatly gloved hand. In another instant he glanced around cautiously and met her gaze of instinctive surprise and pleasure at recognizing someone in this unwonted place. He smiled, and the next moment he was seated beside her.

"Well, I'd no idea of seeing you here," she said warmly.

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"Oh, I go out on this road every day, you know. I'm started in the wrong direction now — going into town for the evening." His admiring gaze rested on her glowingly. "You're looking *remarkably* well."

"Oh, yes, I *am* well," said Katherine, the rich colour rising in her cheek.

"Gray — this is gray, is n't it? — is very becoming to you. But I used to like to see you in that purplish suit last winter. I often look at that chair in the office, and imagine that you are sitting there. Such nice chats as we used to have! You don't know how much I've missed you — I'd have been willing to have those payments take a year! Look me up some time, won't you?"

"No," said Katherine, stupidly confused.

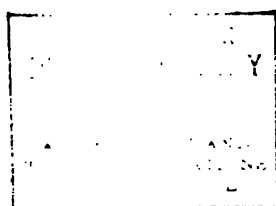
He laughed and raised his eyebrows, spreading out his hands also as one who protests and relinquishes at the same time.

"Well — just as you say, of course." He seemed to forget what he was going to say, in looking at her, and then dropped into a tone amusedly confidential. "Remsen all right now?"

"Perfectly," said Katherine, becoming all of a sudden blazingly angry at the mention of her husband's name. Remsen — how



HER BEAUTIFUL EYES WELLED AS SHE LOOKED AT HIM



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dare he speak of Remsen in that tone? Why, he would not dare to speak to her at all if Remsen were there! It gave her an extraordinary sensation. She hardly heard the rest of his conversation, short and unimportant as it was; they were soon in the dock, and she almost stumbled over the gangplank in her haste to get away from him; it seemed ages before she could get home. She tingled with contempt when she thought of Wallace's cautious expression before she had smiled at him; he was only a boy, as his wife said, but oh, she was married to a man! For the first time she wondered how she could have gone to him about the money; how had she been so stupid, how had she not *known* that Remsen would have hated it! Remsen — as he had flamed at the idea of any slightest discredit touching her, she flamed now when it seemed to touch him. He was right — he had always been right. Oh, she *might* have understood!

In those ages and ages that it took to get home, she began to have a strange sense that even in the most trivial setting aside of the bonds of marriage one might be making way for some tremendous disintegrating force.

Remsen was not yet in the house when

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she reached it — she was glad of that. She went out into the little garden and picked a great bunch of white lilacs, and when she came in again she filled the Cloisonné vase with water, and put them in it — their soft plumes nearly covered it, and the sweet, homelike fragrance filled the room. The flaw did not go through — the jar held the water. When Remsen came in he looked at it with a pleased surprise. “*Hel-lo,*” he said. “Those lilacs are very pretty there. I thought you did n’t like my Cloisonné vase?”

“I do,” said Katherine quickly.

“Since when?”

“Since this afternoon — when I met Mr. Wallace!” She proudly felt that there was nothing that she could not say — there was no forbidden ground, for there could be no ground on which they were not one. “Oh, how could I *ever* have—— He spoke of *you*.” She reached up to put her arms around his neck with a soft fierceness in the embrace, a tender violence that strained him to her as closely as she could. His face reddened quickly; it almost seemed as if his big form trembled as he said with a little sadness in his voice:

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"You never did that before, *Kathleen!*"

"Oh!" said Kathleen. Her beautiful eyes welled as she looked at him. "*I* never knew how to love you — I never was really *married* to you before!"

THE END

